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The Heir Presumptive and the Heir Apparent.

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OF CARLINGFORD," "NEIGHBOURS ON THE GREEN,"
"KIRSTEEN," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LETITIA'S triumph and delight when she found that she was to have her ball to herself, without the presence either of Lady Frogmere, who would have made her seem second in what she called her own house, or Mar, who would have been the hero of the evening had he appeared, were almost more than words could say. It seemed to her too good to be true that Mary should come, giving thus her sanction and approval, and then go away, interfering with nothing; and that Mar should play into her hands, and disqualify himself by the fatigue of his long ramble, a thing which she could not have hoped for! It seemed to Mrs. Parke as if Providence had taken the matter in hand and was fighting for her. It is easy to be pious when things go so much to one's mind, and it is always so easy to deceive one's-self about the virtuousness of one's aims. When a woman is scheming for her children and their benefit, does it not seem as if the stars in their courses should fight for her? And Letitia would have indignantly flung off the charge of selfishness: was it not all for Duke—for her husband and her children—that they should have everything they wanted and a happy life? that they should, if possible, have all the honours of the race secured to them, or at least should triumph as much as possible over the untoward accident which had alienated these honours? It was not for herself, Letitia would have said, with fine indignation—what could it matter for her? and what could it be supposed but a mother's first and highest duty to strive for the advantage of Duke?

It must not be supposed, however, that Mrs. Parke's treatment

of Mar had any distinct evil intention. It was her real conviction that the boy would not live, and she dealt with him as the man in the parable dealt with the talent which was given to him to make profit of, and which he laid up in a napkin. Had she been more generously inspired she would have endeavoured, even by taking a risk, to stimulate the forces of the delicate boy. Had he been her own son this is what she would have done; but Letitia's first thought was, not to save him, but that it might not be said he had been exposed to any danger while under her charge. She thought that she protected herself from all blame by making a hothouse plant of the boy, and shutting him up from every wind that blew. "No one can say he has not been taken every care of," she said. Should "anything happen" she, at least, would thus be free from blame. It would be known to all that she had been more careful of him than of her own—that she had not suffered the winds of heaven to visit his cheeks too roughly; that she had kept him from fatigue, from excitement, from everything calculated to hurt him. And in all this she was sincere enough. That she had also wished to ignore him, to keep him in the background, to give her own children the advantages which were meant chiefly for Mar, did not hurt her conscience. It was not for herself—she derived no benefit from the fact that Mar was not sent to school—on the contrary it was a self-denial to her, a bond preventing her from amusing herself as she would, never leaving home except for a day or two. That it gave to Duke the principal place, and made John a much more important person in the county, were objects unconnected with Mrs. Parke's personality: then how could she be called selfish? It can never be selfishness to strive for the pre-eminence of your husband and your child. Thus Letitia made her conscience quite comfortable when it did by chance give her a pinch. But generally it must be said her perfect conviction that she was right, whatever she did, daunted her conscience and kept everything quiet. Of course she was right! She had a delicate boy to bring up who everybody said would never be reared, and she took such care of him that he was never exposed to a draught, or suffered to escape from the cotton-wool in which her assiduous and constant attention enveloped him. What could a woman do more? She thus put herself beyond the possibility of reproach whatever happened, while strengthening the conviction of everybody around

that the young Lord Frogmore would never live to grow up ; but if people chose to form that conclusion the fault was not Letitia's. She shared it indeed herself, and shook her head over the state of Mar's health ; but when amiable neighbours said, " If care will save him I am sure, dear Mrs. Parke, you will do it," she shook her head again. " I do all I can," she said, " at the risk of being told I do more harm than good. Some people think I should try bracing for him—exposing him like the other children. But I think it is best to be on the safe side. I shall be blamed anyhow, whatever happens, I know," she would add with a smile. She would have convinced any one ; and she did convince herself. She thought she was only angry with Mar because it was so difficult to make him take proper precautions. She was certain that she wished nothing but his good.

It may be supposed that the exhibition in the tent, the sudden surging up of Mar—the delicate boy whom nobody knew—into a distinct boyish personality, suddenly producing himself in the most attractive and characteristic way at Duke's dinner, when she intended only Duke to be thought of, was gall and bitterness to Letitia. She was almost beside herself with rage and exasperation. It had been all planned for Duke. It had been intended to give him the aspect of the heir (which he was sure to be eventually), and if there can be supposed any more sharp deception, any more poignant disappointment than Letitia's, when she saw the other boy, who was the shadow upon Duke's sunshine, the barrier to his advancement, pushed to the front, and so conducting himself there as to make it for ever impossible to speak of him as of a sick and puny child—it would be very difficult to find it. That she could have strangled Mar, and also Duke and Letty, and every one who was in the complot, in the exasperation of her soul, is not too much to say. She had to conceal this under the appearance of anxiety lest the boy should have harmed himself ; and discoursed, as has been seen, on the danger of excitement for him, with a bitterness and energy which went too far, and betrayed something of her real motive at least to some of her children. But that real motive was not a guilty one. It was only to keep Mar in the background and bring forward her own boy. That was all—only to make Duke first, which by an accident he was not—which he ought to be by age, the other being really no more than a child, a child to whom it was pernicious to be brought

forward like that, to be forced out of the quiet life which was the only thing possible to him. Letitia found herself able to carry matters with a high hand, both with her conscience and those keen critics her children. Of course she was angry. It was the very worst thing that could have happened to Mar. And for his poor mother who had fainted, what a shock !

When it happened after this that Mary fled, taking a hurried leave, excusing herself anxiously, imploring Letitia not to think her unkind, and left the course clear ; and that Mar, in his elation, possibly, after yesterday, and foolish fancy that he had emancipated himself, went and took that long walk and unfitted himself for the fatigue of the evening, Letitia's spirit—we will not say her heart—gave a bound of satisfaction. The stars in their courses were fighting for her. She was mistress of her own entertainment, undeniably the most important person, not overshadowed by the woman who never ought to have been Lady Frogmore. And when the county ladies, so many of whom had heard of it, began to talk to her of the event of yesterday, and to express their satisfaction in hearing that her young nephew was so much stronger and had made quite a speech and such a good impression, Letitia felt herself supported by every right feeling in the gravity with which she still continued to shake her head. " Ah, poor Mar ! Yes, he did very well, poor boy ; but it has cost him dear. I did not take much satisfaction in his speech, for I knew it would cost him dear."

" I suppose he is here to-night," said the great lady of the county, putting up her eyeglass and looking round her. " I want to see him if you will let me, for his father and I were great friends. I want to ask him to Highwood now he is getting old enough——"

" Oh, he is not here," said Letitia. " He is in bed with a sort of nervous attack and great weakness. I tell my Duke his cousin was unable for excitement, but it is so difficult to make boys understand."

" It was not that, mamma—it was the long walk," whispered Letty at her ear.

" I see the Miss Winfords without partners," said Mrs. Parke severely, " and shoals of young men about. Go and introduce them—you little horror !" said the mother, the last words under her breath, and she turned again to the great county lady. " I

knew," she said, "that he could not bear anything of the kind. Absolute quiet is the only thing that suits poor Mar. But my boy is very fond of him and thinks it kindness to thrust him forward. All pure affection, but affection does just as much harm as enmity—or more sometimes." Letitia spoke with a strength of conviction which much impressed the ladies who were listening. "It is a great disappointment to us all," she said, "poor boy, that he can't be here to-night."

The same question was put to her again and again during the evening. "Where is little Frogmore? I want to see little Frogmore. I hear he quite distinguished himself at your tenants' dinner, Parke." "What have you done with the boy? I made sure we should see him to-night." "Where is the young lord?" These were the demands that flew about on every side.

John, carefully tutored by his wife, made an answer as much like hers as it was possible for so different a speaker to make.

"Yes, he made a famous speech. He's a fine boy, but overdid himself, and my wife has put him to bed. My wife's too careful over the boy," said John.

"Ah, it is a great responsibility to have the care of children that are not your own," said some one standing by.

"I suppose so," said Mr. Parke, smoothing his big moustache.

The responsibility would not have moved John. He would have let Mar take his chance with the rest, and made no difference; but he had been well tutored, and made to see that this would never do. "A mother's always anxious, you know," he said. "As for me, I think it does more harm than good."

Letitia had, after much vexation, come to the conclusion that it was not a bad thing John should talk like this. It would show that there was no agreement between them for keeping Mar out of the way.

And the ball was most brilliantly successful—more successful, every one said, than any ball in the county had been for years. There was no shadow at all upon it—no reminder to the family that they were temporary tenants, and that in a few years they would all have to retire from the scene, which they all used and rejoiced in as if it were their own.

Mrs. Parke, in the satisfaction of finding all possible rivalry absent, felt that her feet were upon her native heath as she had never done: she talked to everybody of Duke's prospects, and of

the difference it made when he came home. She spoke of the younger boys, who would have their own way to make, and must not think they would always have their father's house to fall back upon. She spoke of John's good intelligence with "the tenants," and how well he was getting on with the Home Farm, which he had taken into his own hands. For this night only she forgot to be careful; she took the full enjoyment of the position, as if everything was her own. Nearly a dozen years she had been in the house, with full command of everything. The children had grown up in it. How could she help feeling that it was her own? She forgot all about guardians and executors, and it seemed to her for a blessed hour or two as if all difficulties had been smoothed away, and Duke was indeed the heir, and she herself all but Lady Frogmore. Moments of intoxication will come like this in everybody's career—when we remember nothing that is against us, and are able to believe that all we wish is going to be fulfilled. It was remarked how Mrs. Parke's eyes, not bright by nature, glittered, and how her little person seemed to swell with satisfaction and pride as she moved about doing the honours. But her aspect, I am afraid, was not regarded with sympathy by the greater part of her guests. "We are all apt to believe that the outer world takes our view and regards matters from our standing-point in such a moment of triumph. But as a matter of fact that is precisely the time when it does not do so. Letitia's neighbours whispered to each other that Mrs. Parke looked as if everything belonged to her—"which it doesn't at all, you know," and talked as if her husband was the head of the house and her son the heir—"whereas, as soon as little Frogmore comes of age they must all pack off." They thought it bad taste of Letitia not to have produced the boy. "If he's as ill as that she might have had him on the sofa. He ought to have showed for a little," they said. But Mrs. Parke was quite unconscious of their sentiments. There never had been a time in her life when she had so ignored them. Always till now she had retained a consciousness of what people would be saying. But this evening it had vanished from her mind. She was *fey*, as people say in Scotland; her prosperity had gone to her head and made her forget everything that was not delightful. Either some great and critical moment, or perhaps death itself, was in her way.

"Well," she said, when all was over, "it has gone off as I never

saw anything go off before. Everything went well, the music and the floor, and the supper and the temper of the people. They were all so pleasant. The old marchioness made me the prettiest of speeches. She said, 'The Park has never been so brilliant as in your time.' The young people hoped we would have another every year. I said, 'Perhaps'—for after all there is nothing so easily managed as a ball when it *is* a success."

"You must remember, Letitia," said John, "that there cannot be very many years now before we've got to march out bag and baggage."

"Oh, don't speak nonsense," she cried incredulously. In the sweep of her excitement she would not receive that thought.

"But, mother, it's true," said Duke. "I've liked the ball awfully. You are one for this sort of thing; nobody can do it like you. But of course when Mar comes of age——"

"Oh, don't speak to me of Mar. He'll never come of age!" she cried in the wildness of her elated mood. There was a universal cry: "Letitia! Mother! Mamma!" in different tones of indignation and horror.

She was driven out of all sense of decorum in her heat and excitement. "Oh, you set of fools!" Letitia said.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NEXT morning Mar, who had slept little all night, was found to be feverish and unwell, which was a state of affairs by no means unusual or alarming, but which gave to Letitia a sort of additional triumph. "What did I say to you?" she cried. "You dragged him out of the quiet that is natural at his age and forced him to make a public appearance. You seem quite pleased with yourselves, all of you, though I told you what would happen. And here he is in bed again, and no telling when he may be allowed to get up."

"It was the walk yesterday, mamma," said Letty, "and not sleeping, what with the noise and the music. It was not making that speech——"

"Of course you must know best," said the mother, "and you have favoured me with your opinion to that effect before."

"Oh, mamma, don't, please, be angry. Mar says he is quite well enough to get up. He says it is only because he didn't sleep."

"Of course he knows best," said Letitia. "You are all so sure of your own wisdom. But I hope it will convince you that for his own interests that sort of thing must not be done."

She went away, however, without giving any distinct orders, and Mar got up. But when he was up he was giddy and "queer," so he said, and quite disposed to lie down again. The tide of life was so strong in the house with all these young people about that a delicate boy was not much remarked. Duke would rush up in the middle of his own occupation with his tennis bat still in his hand, or in his cricketing costume fresh from the village green, and say, "Hallo, Mar! no better? You must get better, old fellow, and come and have a game." And Letty came in many times a day to ask how he was getting on. "You really must be better to-morrow, Mar," she said. "Mamma puts it all down to the tenants' dinner, and says you should not have been allowed to speak. She puts all the blame on Duke and me."

"There is no blame," said Mar; "it is only that I am such a poor creature. I am never good for anything."

"Well, you must be better to-morrow," Letty would say, and go off to her ride, or perhaps to her tennis, which she too played very well. And then Tiny would come in with her hair flying in her haste, as soon as her lesson was over. "Are you better, Mar?"

"Oh, yes, a little; but I shall not go downstairs to-day," the boy would say, smiling at her.

"Oh, it is too tiresome," cried Tiny; "I want you to come with me and get some water-lilies out of the pond. Duke's always so busy; he will never do anything. And I want you to come down the village with me to see the man about those little dachshund puppies. It is too bad of you, Mar, to be ill now. I want you so much."

"I am very sorry, Tiny; but you see I can't help myself."

"Oh, you could if you would try hard! Just put on a resolution and make up your mind, and do, do be better to-morrow!" cried Tiny with vehemence. It is to be feared that this earnestness was simply on Tiny's own account, to whom Mar was a most serviceable follower—but the boy was grateful for this vigorous demand.

"I will if I can," he said—and then Tiny flew off with her hair waving, and he remained till the next visitor arrived. To tell the truth it was rather pleasant to them all to find him there always

ready to hear what they had to say: and when they expressed their impatience with his illness, or ordered him imperiously to get well, they were, though unconsciously, only half sincere. "It's nice to have you to run to always, Mar." Tiny said, who being the youngest was the most unabashed in the utterance of fact. And Mar smiled and replied that it was nice to have them all coming to him. "If I am ever dull I know I shall soon hear some one running upstairs."

"But remember," cried Tiny, "you have promised to be better to-morrow."

"Oh, yes," said Mar, "I shall be better to-morrow."

"If you don't, I heard mamma say she would send for the doctor, Mar."

"I shall be better," cried the boy. And as a matter of fact he did drag himself downstairs and got out to the avenue in a dutiful endeavour to follow Tiny to see after the dachshund puppies; but he grew so pale, and so soon found out that he could not drag one foot after the other, that a great panic arose among the young people. Duke was called from his tennis (for there were visitors that afternoon and a great game was going on) by Tiny in a voice more like that of a signalman in a gale than of a young lady. "Duke!" she said, "Mar's fainted," which brought Duke with a rush like a regiment of cavalry across the lawn, followed by Letty, her white dress flashing like a ray of light across the shadows. Mar fainted! They flung themselves upon him where he half sat, half lay upon a great trunk of a tree which had lain there for years overgrown with moss and lichens—the very same upon which Mary his mother had once thrown herself before he was born.

"No—I haven't fainted—I'm only—very tired. I'll go in again directly," said Mar.

"Oh, can't you carry him home, Duke? We'll help you. Oh, it is all my fault," cried Tiny. "If I had only known!"

"Old fellow," cried Duke, who had the tears in his eyes, "if you'll put your arms round my neck I'll carry you. I can, I can. Oh, I wish you were twice the weight."

"Don't worry him," cried Letty. "He would rather walk with your arm and mine. Oh, I did not know you were so ill, Mar!"

Here Letitia came hurrying towards them, which brought a little colour to Mar's cheeks.

"What's the matter?" she said. "You have stopped two games, rushing off like mad creatures. Oh, I might have known it was Mar."

"The two games may go to—Bath," cried Duke, flinging away from him with disdain the racquet which he had still been holding in his hand.

"I'm quite able to walk now," said Mar. "I'll go home. Go back to your game, please. I'm not very well, Aunt Letitia. I couldn't get on any further, and Tiny took fright; that's all."

"You can give him your arm indoors, Duke, which he never ought to have quitted. I can't conceive what he means. He is always doing something to pose as if he was not taken care of. Letty, go back to your friends—go back when I tell you! I hope I know how to manage him. You can tell the doctor to come when he has finished his game. It is a good thing he is here. Now come along, Mar; a little energy. If you could walk so far as this coming out you may surely get back again."

"Oh, easily," said Mar. And though it was not easy at all he accomplished it, and got back to the sofa in the schoolroom, where he had spent so many wistful days, putting the best face upon it that he could and urging Duke to return to his game, which that light-hearted youth, quite reassured to see that his cousin could walk and could smile, did not hesitate to do, flying downstairs heaven knows how many steps at a time to get back to his play. The anxious group which had gathered round Mar like a whirlwind dispersed again in the same way, relieved, and thinking no evil. Oh, yes, he was better—no worse than he often was; nothing to be frightened about.

"And now let's finish our game," said Duke.

The robust yet careless family affection, which would have done anything for the weakling among them, left him, cheerful and comforted, as soon as he was "better," having no anxious thought.

And Mar was left to Letitia and her terse and unemotional questionings. It was Mrs. Parke's habit to take all his ailments as a sort of reproach to herself.

"You might have known that it was not fit for you to go out in the blazing sun," she said; "but you seem to take a pleasure in behaving as if no attention was ever paid to you."

She went and got him a cushion with her own hands, and thrust it under his head with an irritable movement, and walked up and

down the room, drawing down a blind over the window which gave Mar a glimpse of the sky and green trees he loved, and putting things in order which needed no arrangement.

"The doctor is a long time over his game," she said to the old nurse, who still attended to the wants of the schoolroom. "I think he might have come before now."

"Don't let me keep you up here, Aunt Letitia," said Mar. "There is not much the matter with me; it is a pity to trouble the doctor."

"You will please not meddle with what I do, Mar," she replied. "If you would only pay a little attention to what may be expected from yourself——"

The doctor came at last, and asked a great many questions and looked very grave. He ordered Mar to bed, not to lie on the sofa any longer, and gave a great many directions about quiet and fresh air and beef tea. He himself helped the boy to his room, and was so careful and so kind that there came to Mar's mind a half elation, half melancholy, in the thought that he was going to be ill—that at last, after his years of delicate health, there was going to be something the matter with him which would prove all that Mrs. Parke had said, and of which he would possibly die. A great excitement, silent and suppressed, rose in his mind with this thought. It was alarming and strange, but it was not altogether displeasing. There is a kind of pre-eminence, of superiority, in being very ill, to a boy. It was like going into a battle. He felt solemnized, yet half amused. He was to be the hero of a sort of drama—he was to be in danger of his life. It pleased his imagination, which had so little food. And he tried to catch what the doctor was saying when he followed Mrs. Parke into the next room. But by that time he was getting drowsy and his faculties dulled, and this he could not do.

In the next room the conference was grave enough. "He has never been ill before," said the doctor. "I ever told you so from the first, Mrs. Parke; delicate but not ill, and nothing that he might not shake off with time. But he is ill now. If I am not mistaken he is in for an attack of typhoid, and I fear a bad one. I'll go straight to the hospital at Claremont and send you a nurse—indeed, you had better have two nurses—care is everything. With great care and unremitting attention we may pull him through."

Letitia was pale, but she was ready for the emergency. "It will not be dangerous for the others?" she said.

"No, no, there's no danger for the others—unless your drains are bad. But he says he was at that horrid little village on the other side of the park on Friday last, and got a drink of water there. That's enough to account for it. I've often spoken about the state of these cottages. It would be a kind of strange justice if he were to be the first victim. I suppose you'll let his mother know?"

"What is the use of letting his mother know? She takes no notice of him. I think I am the only mother he has ever known."

"There was an aunt," said the doctor, "who was very much devoted to him. They ought to be told. The fever is high, and he has a delicate constitution. He may have to fight for his life."

"Will you come again to-night?" she said.

"I will send the nurses in at once if I can get two, otherwise, perhaps, your old woman will take the night? I'll come back first thing in the morning. But I think you should let the relations know."

When the doctor was gone Letitia followed him out of the room and went to the schoolroom, which was quite cool and empty. She sat down upon the sofa which had supported Mar's languid limbs so long, and looked round her as if upon a new world. Her whole being was filled with excitement which threatened to burst all bounds. She felt as if she must have burst forth in laughing or in crying, and if she did not do so it was because the influence of conventional rules and common decorum are too strong to be broken. Every pulse was going like the wheels of a steam engine, and her heart thumping like the great piston that keeps all in motion. Was it anxiety and alarm for Mar that roused that tremendous tumult in her brain? It is to be supposed that she thought so, or tried to make herself think so for the moment. But she knew very well that this was only a gloss forced by a horrified consciousness upon her, and that in the bottom of her heart it was a sudden and dreadful hope which had sprung up in her mind. The child had been so delicate all his life, one whom all the gossips declared she would never rear; and this had left a vague anticipation as of something she could not prevent, which would be good for them all if it came, modified by a fear of what might be said should it happen in her house, which kept Letitia

always uneasy, and dictated those precautions which were half regard for other people's opinion and half terror of herself. But Mar, though he had been so delicate, had kept, perhaps for that very reason, curiously free of the usual ailments of childhood. When he had them he had them in the lightest form. Never before had this delicate boy, this interloper who stood between Letitia and so many advantages, this child who everybody prophesied could not live—never before had he visibly hung between life and death. Typhoid fever! It was a name to chill the blood in the veins of loving parents, of anxious friends. It made Letitia's blood boil with a fever of impatience, of desire, of horrible eagerness, at which she was terrified, but which she could not restrain. It was not her fault. She had done nothing to bring it about. He had got the poison out of her house because of his own childish imprudence, exposing himself as she never would have allowed him to expose himself. Letitia's conscience was quite clear, and nobody could blame her. And he would die—a creature so fragile, with so little life in him, no constitution to fall back upon: there was no fear of a long and terrible illness; a fever that sucked the strength away, and killed the strongest men, would not last long in such a case as this. He would die. She gasped with sensations unspeakable, and felt as if she could not get her breath. He would die. The obstacle would be taken away from her path, from John's, from Duke's, and nobody could say that she had done it or was in any way to blame. What a thought to invade and fill her whole consciousness, all the being of a woman who was a mother, and knew what it was in a way to love those who belonged to her! She could not keep down the wild buoyancy of her hope and exhilaration. This boy, who never ought to have existed, who had been from his birth the obstacle to all her hopes, this supplanter, this undesired, unnecessary child—he would die! and for Letitia and all who belonged to her the future of her brightest hopes would be secured at last.

But with this there sprang up in her mind a dreadful impatience. It did not seem to her that she could go on day after day enduring all the vicissitudes of this illness until the crisis came—if indeed his strength held out till any crisis came. Sometimes the patient, if he were weak, collapsed early, and the disease did not run its full course; sometimes it was rapid, violent, *foudroyant*. A hundred confused calculations ran through her mind. Mar had

not life enough for that. Probably the fever would be slow with his low vitality, not blazing but sapping the life away—and she would have to keep up all through—expressing anxiety, watching day and night for the change, looking on with outward calm while the doctors would go through all that daily pantomime with the thermometer, which she would scarcely be able to endure. Yes, this is how it would be—weeks of it, perhaps; horrible, lingering on when it might just as well be over at once without all this slow torture. Letitia remembered, after what seemed a long time, that she had an afternoon party on the lawn, and that all her guests would be wondering at her absence. She would have to put on a grave face, and speak of her anxiety and his delicacy, and go through all the fantastic performances which decorum demanded. But he would die—of that certainty at least there could be no doubt now.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE family were all very much startled by the news, which Letitia communicated only when the arrival of a nurse in the costume which is not to be mistaken startled the household.

"What does that woman want?" said John, who was prejudiced, like so many gentlemen, against costume, and did not like the professional air.

"She is the nurse whom Dr. Barker has sent for Mar."

"For Mar!" cried all the party with varying tones of expression. Letitia looked round upon her husband and her children, and she felt that there was not one of them who had any sympathy with her—who thought at all of the consequences or of what would happen—if—. She was provoked beyond expression by the look of alarm and imbecile anxiety on all their faces.

"What is the matter?" John said. "Is there anything more than usual? I thought he had a cold. What is wrong with the boy?"

"Only an attack of typhoid," Mrs. Parke said with angry gravity. They never did sympathize with her or enter into any of her thoughts—though the advantage she anticipated was to them chiefly, she said to herself angrily, and not to her.

And that dreadful word was soon abroad in all the house. It was the evening, after dinner, and all who were at home were in the drawing-room. The two schoolboys, Reggie and Jack, had, of

course, gone back to school. And the young ones had been talking of their lawn tennis, and So-and-so's low service, and somebody's volleying, and a great deal of other jargon. They had been obliged to dress in a great hurry for dinner, and no one had had the time to run in and ask for Mar. "Typhoid!" they cried, some of them in loud and some of them in low tones.

"Who says so? You are always fancying something dreadful. Does Barker say so? And how did he get it?" said John. "I am sure we have had trouble enough with the drains."

"If one is to have it one will have it—whatever is done about the drains," said Mrs. Parke.

"But oh, mamma," said Letty, "why a nurse? I know a great deal about nursing. There were those two ambulance classes. It would be so much nicer for dear Mar to have his own people about him. Sarah would sit up at night—she is very fond of him—and I would take care of him in the day."

Letitia did not take the trouble to reply, but looked at the girl only, crushing her as effectually as by a torrent of words. "He shall have every care," she said, "and the best that can be got; but he has no constitution, and I fear it will go badly with him. There is no use in deceiving ourselves."

"Don't be a croaker," cried John, getting up from his chair. It would have been strange, perhaps, if there had not flashed across the mind of John all that was implied in this evil augury. He was not quick, nor was he more selfish than other men, but into the hearts of the most innocent there is projected by times a picture as from a magic-lantern, showing as it seems from without, not from within, in a sudden glare of diabolical light the advantage which a great misfortune to some one else may bring them. John was as much horrified by this sudden perception as if he had been compassing the end of Mar. He cried out, "Good God!" which was in reality an appeal against the devilish light that had flashed upon him without any will of his; and then his voice melted, and he murmured, "Poor little Mar. Poor little Mar!"

"Don't give in in that way, father," cried Duke. "Typhoid fever is bad enough, but not so bad as mother makes out. Why, I know half-a-dozen men who have had it. At Harrow there was one fellow as bad as bad could be, and not strong, just like Mar, and he got round all right. The stronger the fellow the worse it is for him. That's what all the doctors say."

These words brought a cold chill to Letitia. In her thoughts, by way of forestalling all the disappointments there might happen, she had already thought of this.

"Oh, mamma, send for some new books from Mudie's directly," said Tiny; "when Mar is ill we can never get enough books to satisfy him."

"Oh, hold your tongue, Tiny. He will be too ill to read books," said Letty with tears; "and one must not let him talk either, but just a very little—nor even talk to him to amuse him till the fever goes off."

"How dull it will be for Mar!" cried Tiny. "I am sure I shall talk to him and tell him everything. To be dull is as bad as having a fever. Because you have gone to the ambulances you think you know—but I don't believe in keeping people so quiet. When I had the measles——"

"Be quiet both of you," said Mrs. Parke, "and understand that neither of you go near Mar. He must be left in the hands of the nurses—it is too serious to play with. I shall go myself every day to see that all is right."

There was a chorus of outcries at this decision, but Mrs. Parke was not moved. "No one must disturb him," she repeated. "The people who have the best chance are the people in the hospitals—and Mar must be treated just as if he were in a hospital—I will not have him disturbed."

"Is it so grave as that, Letitia?" asked John very seriously, scarcely looking at her. He began to divine partly from that gleam which had come upon himself what must be in her mind.

"Nothing could be more grave," she said vehemently; "any one except a schoolboy or a silly girl must see that. What Duke says is nonsense. It stands to reason that a weakly boy with no constitution to fall back upon, attacked by a slow disease that eats away the strength——"

John Parke rose as if the thought were intolerable, and went out of the room hurriedly. He was trying to escape from that devilish suggestion. The boy would die; all the hindrances would be removed; the inheritance would be his which he had always looked forward to, which had been supposed to be his all his life. Not in John's honest brain was that thought bred. It filled him with horror of himself. It made him feel as if he were Mar's murderer, anticipating the boy's doom. "God forgive me!

God forgive me!" cried John: and he went out, covered with a cold dew of trouble, to humble himself and struggle with the demon. These horrible suggestions come sometimes to the minds that most loathe them: which proves to many people that there is a devil, a dreadful Satan trying what harm he can do, even though we grow contemptuous of the horns and hoofs.

The doctor, however, was not so gloomy as Letitia. "It is quite true that he must not be disturbed; but keeping up his spirits is half the battle, and he must not be abandoned either. Mrs. Parke is too anxious. I have always told her she made more than was necessary of young Frogmore's complaints. He's delicate, of course. Still, there's no reason for giving up hope."

"My boy Duke," said John, "says that it's worse for strong fellows than for weak. I don't know if he's right."

"Well, it's never a good thing to be weak," said Dr. Barker, "but there's a kind of truth in it. For the fever sometimes runs higher with a man in the prime of life. Keep up your spirits. If no complications arise we'll pull him through."

Those cheerful tones found no response in the countenance of Letitia, which was tragical in the paleness of passionate feeling. Every word that was uttered by the medical optimist was like a knell in Letitia's heart. If it should be so indeed—but it could not, it would not be so.

"Mrs. Parke has always taken too serious a view," said the cheerful doctor. "I have told her so for years."

"I don't say that I don't always take a serious view," said Letitia. "It is my temperament, I suppose—but you will bear me witness, doctor, that I never have been so anxious about my own children as I have been about Mar."

"Yes, that is true," said the doctor with a quick glance at her, in which there was something uncertain, doubtful. Perhaps it was the look of suppressed excitement in her which struck Dr. Barker as something strange. She was not an over-anxious mother. Was it love or another sentiment that made her so tragic about Mar? A slight shiver ran over the honest and sensible country practitioner, but he was far too little accustomed to evil passions to follow it further. He could not take into his mind such a dreadful thought; it was like a ghostly figure sweeping by in the dark, such as he sometimes met on lonely roads on winter nights—not able to tell whether it was a belated fugitive

or a distorted shadow. Another subject of more practical importance, as he thought, displaced this vague apprehension. "By-the-by," he said, "I must not forget one thing. I have been talking to you of the state of those cottages on the other side of the park for years. I've got the water to analyze which these poor people are drinking, and I believe it's the cause of poor young Frogmore's illness. Let this be a reason at once for seeing after their condition: at least it will be getting some good out of the evil which now you cannot prevent. You know I've been talking about it for years."

"The cottages?" said John. He added, "You know I'm in a peculiar position. I can do nothing without Blotting. It's not as if it was my own property."

"Oh, what is the use of talking of such things just now?" said Letitia sharply. There was a sort of half-electrical glance between the two which the doctor felt to blaze across him, scorching his face. He gave a horrified look from one to the other, surprising that infernal light in Letitia's eyes. But John's were covered with downcast eyelids, and the look of his somewhat heavy face was not consistent with that unearthly, devilish flash. Dr. Barker, however, was struck as a man might be struck by lightning. He seemed to lose his moral equilibrium for the moment. A chill horror ran in his veins. When he thought of the boy-patient upstairs with his cheeks growing hollow and his eyes large under the influence of the fever, and these two watching its progress, perhaps communicating to each other how things were going, hoping for the worst and not the better conclusion! It was as if the earth had been cut away from under his feet and he saw himself suddenly on the edge of a horrible precipice. He rode away upon his rounds with a doubt whether it was safe to leave the house, whether he ought not to set up some special guard that no evil should approach the boy. Poor boy, with no one who loved him to look after him, but only dangerous hate and the vigilance of an enemy! The honest country doctor had never in his life been struck as he was that day with a sense of secret horror, danger and possible crime concealed under the smooth surface of ordinary existence. Twice he turned back before he had got out of the avenue with the idea of warning his nurses, recommending to them special vigilance, and not to allow Mrs. Parke to have anything to do with the patient. But how dared

he do such a thing, to rouse any suspicion of the mistress of the house? He had no evidence but a glance, and who could rely upon a look? He might, very probably had—must have—mistaken it; and twice he turned his horse, and at last rode away, but with a mind troubled by many anxious thoughts. He consoled himself by thinking that with two nurses on whom he could depend no harm could happen to the patient. But after all it was not so much the harm that could happen as the dreadful idea that his nearest relations were watching by his sick bed, hoping that he might never rise from it, that upset the doctor. He said to himself that between that and doing anything to expedite the end there was a great difference, and perhaps it was impossible when there was so much at stake not to be conscious what a difference it would make. Dr. Barker had been in the district a long time, and remembered Lord Frogmore's marriage and how everybody said it was very hard upon John Parke. So it was, very hard. To expect so long that he was to be his brother's heir, and then to be suddenly cut out. There had been a great deal of sympathy with him at the time, and perhaps it was impossible now not to think if the boy was removed—— Perhaps it was natural, inevitable, that the disappointed pair should be open to that thought. But to imagine them watching, waiting, while the innocent boy lay ill, hoping for a bad turn, higher fever, hopeless complications—— Good heavens! could anything more dreadful be?

John Parke was innocent of entertaining such thoughts. But he divined them, and his heart was wrung within him. He scarcely spoke to Letitia while the fever strengthened its hold upon Mar, but went solemnly morning and evening to the door to ask of the nurses how their patient was. Sometimes he stood at the open door looking in, saying as well as he could a cheerful good morning to the boy. "Make haste and get well, my lad," he would say: and John, though he was not given to anything of the kind, would sometimes bring a rose and sometimes a piece of flowering myrtle from the great tree at the door of the conservatory to lay on the little table at Mar's bedside. Mar, when he was able to remark them, was much touched by these little attentions, and John would go away again soothed by the sight of the active nurses in their white aprons, and the quiet and order of the sick room. It was a comfort to think that everything was being

done. This is a great consolation to every kind looker-on whose anxiety is less urgent than that of love. John never saw Letitia there; he knew that the nurse who was on duty, if moved by no profound sentiment for one patient more than another, was yet on the whole desirous that every one should get well, and had her professional reputation more or less involved in the success of her nursing. There was thus at least no hostile sentiment, only well-wishers, careful watchers, concerned for his recovery, who were near the boy.

But neither he nor any one, any more than the doctor, had any fear of Letitia as if she had been capable of plotting against the young life. No, no, no, a hundred times no. They divined the passion that was in her, the sense of a possibility which would change everything in life, and perhaps, a wish against which in her heart no doubt she struggled, and would not allow that the balance should turn the wrong way. John pushed the thought from him with passion, ashamed of himself for the suspicion of his wife. He felt that she would not be sorry for Mar's obliteration—such a faint, young, powerless personality—from existence: which would have such tremendous consequences that her mind was carried away by them. And that was bad enough, but it was all. She would not harm him any more than she would harm Duke; and at the utmost, when all was said, the only evidence against Letitia even to this extent was a strange gleam which she had got into her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MAR'S illness continued week after week, never violent, but never ending. He was not very ill, but his life was being slowly drained away. The fire of the fever was low, not a great flame, blazing and devouring, but it went on and on. The third week passed, and the fourth, with renewed and disappointed expectations of a change, but none came. "It will run out the six weeks," said the doctor. "And then——?" Ah, who could say? The good doctor, who had taken care of Mar all his life, turned away from the question. "It all depends upon his strength," he said. His strength! but he had no strength. He was as weak as a child. The nurse lifted him in her arms like an infant—a skeleton, with long, long limbs. It seemed a farce to speak of his strength, as if there was any hope in that.

Duke had gone away before this time—his leave had come to an end, and he had been allowed to come in and say good-bye to his cousin. "I thought you would have been up and about before I went," said Duke, blustering a little to keep himself from crying. "You are a lazy beggar, to be lying there with nothing the matter. I don't think there's anything the matter with you. You just like to lie there and keep us all slaving attendance. You know you were always a lazy beggar."

Mar did nothing but smile, as he had always done, at Duke's jokes—which were not great jokes. He said, "Is your leave over?" with his faint voice. "But you could have a day or two again if I sent for you, Duke?"

"Oh, yes," said Duke, "you must send for me the first time you are allowed to get out, to help you downstairs. I'll come, never fear." But after a little more of this tearful smiling talk, the young man beckoned softly to the nursing sister to come with him to the door. "What do you think he means about sending for me?" he said, with a face almost as pale as Mar's.

The nurse looked at him and shook her head. She too had grown to like the patient boy. She put up her hand to her eyes to dash away the rising tears. "He must not see that I have been crying," she said.

"Is *that* what he means? Do you think that's what he means? And do you think so too?" cried Duke. "Oh, don't say so, nurse, don't say so; it would break my heart."

"I won't say so," she replied. "I think with such a young thing as that there is always hope."

"And you know a lot," said Duke, "as much as the doctor. God bless you for saying so! But you think that is what he means? And he lies there—and smiles—and thinks—of *that*," said the young man, with his face full of awe. He set out in all the vigour of his young life in the brightness of the summer day to his light work and boundless amusement, with all the world before him—and Mar lying there, smiling and thinking of *that*. Duke felt as if his own lightly beating heart stood still in the poignancy of the contrast. Oh, why could not he give some of his life to help out that flickering existence? He went away feeling that there was a pall over the sunshine, and that nothing would ever be truly bright again. But to be sure that was a mood that could not last.

Mrs. Parke had given orders at first that the girls were not to go near the sick room, but she had not thought then how long it would go on, an endless dreadful ordeal. And when they stole in, now Letty, now Tiny, their mother either did not find it out or made no remark. Letitia during all this time of suspense was of a very strange aspect—her husband and her children did not know what to make of her. She talked very little to them; did not interfere with their pursuits as she usually did. She seemed to care for nothing. Naturally there were no guests or entertainments of any kind, and her interest in her household affairs—which was usually so minute and unending—seemed to have faded altogether. She wrote no letters, made no calls; her social life seemed to come to an end. She did not even go to church, which was a habit she had always kept up rigorously. Three or four times a day she went to the sick room for news of the patient, and it was there alone that she seemed to wake up completely. She put the nurses through a catechism of questions. She attended upon the doctor when he came, and listened to everything he said and that was said to him with a hungry curiosity. Her countenance did not vary or betray it. It was known that she was "over anxious," that she had always taken a despairing view. When he was pronounced to be a little better there was a little quiver of her head, like an unspoken contradiction; and when he was a little worse a sort of assenting gleam came into her eyes. The nurses did not like her, and answered her questions as briefly as possible. Her determination that everything must go badly irritated the women, who had a natural confidence in themselves and in what their nursing could do, and they both believed that she was more satisfied when the news was bad than when it was good. "She's not like his mother," they said between themselves, "and she's fixed in her mind from the first that this is how it's to be—as some people would rather see their mother die than be proved wrong in their opinion." They thought no worse of her than this. As a matter of fact Letitia was very unhappy during this long suspense. She had never anticipated anything of the kind. What she had expected was an illness which would last perhaps a week, and this long lingering malady confounded and exasperated her. She was angry with poor Mar for being so long about deciding what to do, and with the doctor who would not say anything definite, and the nurses whose opinions

wavered from hour to hour. "How is a person to tell, when you are never in the same mind from one hour to another?" she said with the resentment of highly excited nerves. She was strung to the very highest pitch, thinking of nothing else, longing for a crisis, that she might know what she had to look for. She was never at rest for a moment whatever she was doing, but kept always listening, always intent. Every step that approached she thought was some one come to call her, to tell her there was a change. She dropped her work upon her knee, or let her pen fall, to listen for every sound that arose. On the critical day of each week when a crisis might be expected she was so restless that she could not keep still. "My wife is so anxious," John said, trying to persuade himself that her anxiety was the natural anxiety, the desire that the patient should get well. That anxiety is terrible enough as most know: but the other anxiety, the horrible watch which is for the patient getting worse, the longing for "a change" in the worst sense—a change that meant death, how horrible is that, beyond all description! When she talked at all she talked of his symptoms and of what the night nurse said, and what the other said. The nurses took different sides, as was natural. One of them was a pessimist, the other took the doctor's view. It was the night nurse that was the gloomy one—and with her Mrs. Parke was in the habit of having a long consultation very early when she was relieved in the morning—a consultation from which she derived a little satisfaction and which calmed her nervous excitement. But the day nurse with the cheerful look, who always insisted that the patient was a little better, or looked a little brighter, or had a little more strength, or at all events was "no worse," brought back the nervous excitement which was like a fire in her veins.

The fifth week had begun, and the fight of life and death on the boy's wasted frame was becoming every hour more intense. Would his strength hold out?

"He has no strength," said the night nurse. "I feel every hour as if from minute to minute the collapse must come."

"I don't say he isn't very weak," said the more cheerful sister, "but you never can tell with a delicate boy like that how strong the constitution may be. Sometimes it's like iron and steel, and yet no appearance——"

The doctor stood and looked at the worn young countenance

upon the pillow. Mar had scarcely strength to open his eyes, to respond to the doctor's inquiries, and acknowledge the stir of his morning visit. There was a faint smile upon his face, and sometimes a wistful look round upon the group about his bed, moving slowly from one to another. His mind had never been affected. Sometimes he lay as if in a dream, but when recalled was "always himself," the nurse said, "and that is surely a good sign." Dr. Barker did not deny that it was a good sign, but he looked graver than ever. Letitia devoured him with eager eyes when they stood face to face outside the sick room.

"What do you think, doctor?" she said.

"I have told you a hundred times what I think," he replied, with the petulance of distress. "I cannot form a new opinion every hour. If his strength holds out he will do well. All depends upon that. I suppose," he added hastily, "his mother has been kept informed."

"His mother—what does she care?" said Letitia in her excitement. "It is a great thing to us, but it is nothing to her."

"Yes, I can see it is a great thing to you," he answered, with a clouded countenance. "But she has been told, I suppose."

"Oh, what does it matter? What does it matter?" Letitia said within herself in the misery of her suspense. But she wrung her hands till they hurt her, and controlled herself. "I believe news has been sent," she said.

"But that is not enough," said the doctor, glad on his side to have some reason to find fault, to relieve his own brain and heart with an outburst. "She must be told that his state is very serious. She must be made to know——"

"Then you think his state is very serious?" said Letitia, with a kind of wildness of concealed exultation in her eyes.

"Have I ever said otherwise?" said the doctor. "Can any one look at him and not see that?—very grave, but not hopeless, Mrs. Parke. You will never get me to say more."

"It is only because I want to know the truth," she said, abashed.

"I will never tell you anything but the truth. The mother ought to know. However indifferent she may be there must be some human feeling left. I remember her as a very sweet woman. And then there was the aunt, who was devoted to the boy"

"You speak as if there was but one," said Letitia, with a forced smile.

"Oh, I do not overlook your anxiety, Mrs. Parke. No doubt it is very great—but the other ladies must be told. Tell them——" The doctor paused when he saw her hungry look. It flashed into her face that now she would hear the exact truth: how much there was to fear and how much to hope. She looked at him as he paused, clasping her hands tight.

"Yes?" she said, breathless. The doctor, it was evident, had thought better of what he was going to say.

"Tell them," he said, "that the circumstances are serious: that there is an absence of certain of the worse symptoms, but again that the matter is grave—it all depends on how his strength keeps up—and that in the present position of affairs I think they should be here."

"You think they should be here," Letitia repeated breathlessly. It seemed to her the most satisfactory utterance she had yet heard.

"Yes, it would be an ease to your own mind to have his nearest relatives on the spot. They would share your anxiety at least—and it is not as if there was any want of room. They should have been here at once—to prevent reflections—in case anything should happen."

A lightning gleam seemed to come out of Letitia's eyes—like that electrical flash which the doctor had thought scorched him when Mar's illness began.

"Then you think——" she said with a heaving of her breast.

"I think no more than what I have said: but to have Lady Frogmore here and Miss Hill would in any case be best."

Letitia repeated "Lady Frogmore" unconsciously under her breath. It was not of Mary she was thinking. It was of the next bearer of that title, the woman towards whom the coronet was floating ghost-like in a sort of trail of cloud.

"I can't believe," said the doctor sharply, "that Lady Frogmore will be so indifferent as is said to the condition of her son."

Letitia went to her writing-table when he was gone with a strange buoyancy. She had not written any letters for some time, but there was a sort of exultation in her now, as if the end of her suspense was near. John came in when she had seated

herself and begun her letter. He had missed the doctor and was anxious to hear what he had said. There was something in his wife's aspect which startled him. "The boy is better?" he exclaimed. He gave her in the impulse of the moment a credit which she did not deserve.

"Is he?" cried Letitia, turning round upon her chair with all the colour going out of her face. She added tremblingly, shrinking from her husband's eye, "Do you mean that there is a change?"

"I thought so," he said gravely, "from the relieved look in your face."

They contemplated each other for a moment in silence, John with pain and distress, she shrinking a little from his eye. "I don't know what you mean," she said; "though I might be relieved to think that the poor child will not suffer much longer. I am to write to his mother, the doctor says."

"To write to his mother! Then he has given up all hope?"

Letitia did not trust herself to speak, but she nodded her head in assent.

"Poor boy, poor boy!" cried John; "and poor Mary," he added after a moment, with a broken voice.

"It will be nothing to her," said Mrs. Parke briefly.

"God knows! it may rouse her to understand what she's losing: the finest, promising boy, the most generous and patient——"

"Oh, John, I cannot put up with you!" cried Letitia, wild with agitation and excitement. "The one creature that stood between your son and his birthright—between you and everything you have looked for all your life."

John Parke walked about the room in an agitation which was not simple as his emotions generally were. His heart was wrung for the patient boy who had grown up under his eye—but perhaps to forget all that this boy's death would bring him was impossible. He stamped his foot on the ground as if to crush those horrible thoughts that would arise. "If I could buy little Mar's life with the sacrifice of everything!" he said, with an almost hysterical break in his voice.

"It is easy saying so," she said; "but for my part Duke is more to me than Mar!"

CHAPTER XL.

"THEN I suppose there is scarcely any hope?" said Mr. Blotting, the other executor, who had come over to inquire after the patient. The country altogether was moved for poor Mar. People who had never seen the boy sent daily to inquire after him, and the farmers, who had cheered his speech, talked of him and shook their heads as they met on their market days. "There was no stuff in him," they said; "all spirit, and nothing to ballast it." "No constitution from his cradle." And they began to speculate on what kind of landlord John Parke would be when he acted for himself with full power. They all gave a regret to the boy; but that was the most important question after all.

John Parke had not, however, waited, as his wife suggested, to take measures to amend the cottages where Mar had got what was probably to be his death, and it was while they were walking across the park to inspect the miserable little hamlet, which was close to one of the gates, that Mr. Blotting had supposed that there was scarcely any hope.

"My wife has been told to write for his mother," said John very seriously. "Barker would not take such a step as that, in the circumstances, if he did not think it was coming very near."

"Poor Lady Frogmore," said Mr. Blotting, "perhaps it's better for her, poor thing, now, that she has known so little about him—though so unnatural for a mother."

"I wonder," said John, "whether this blow may not stir everything up and awaken her when it's too late."

"It's to be hoped not now," said Mr. Blotting, "poor lady!" And he added after a pause, "It will make a great change in your position, Parke. It may be bad taste talking of it—but we can't help thinking of it. It must be in your mind as it is in mine."

"I try not to think at all," said John; "it's horrible. If I could buy back the boy's life by any sacrifice——"

"I know, I know," said the man of business, "that's how one feels. But you can't, of course. It's far beyond your hands. And if you throw back your thoughts, it was a great disappointment when this poor boy was born. I felt it for one. I felt for you and Mrs. Parke deeply. It couldn't have been expected of a man like your brother, an old man who had never thought of marrying. It was a cruel deception. I can suppose that the poor boy

had very engaging qualities, but it seemed a cruel business at the time——”

“It did, it did,” said John. “My wife felt it very much. It was she who brought Mary, the present Lady Frogmore, into the family so to speak—and she did feel it perhaps more than she ought.”

“Not more,” said Mr. Blotting; “it was very natural, I’m sure. Well, it is an ill wind that blows nobody good, and you will at least get back your rights. What will you do about those houses when they fall in, Parke? Of course you can always command my best advice, but it will make a great difference when I have no authority in the matter and you are acting altogether for yourself——”

“Don’t speak of it, Blotting. I can’t enter on such a question. So long as there is life there is hope.”

But John Parke would have been more than man if he had not allowed a thought or two to surprise him in this kind. He hated himself, but he could not help it: that all this would be his, absolutely his, which he had been managing for another; that he should be able to act independently, to think of the children’s interests without any responsibility or restraint, was a wonderful thought. Poor little Mar! If he could redeem his young life by any sacrifice! But he could not do that. Not all the lands attached to the Frogmore peerage, or all belonging to the British crown, could have any effect upon the disposition of the Supreme Disposer of events. John acquiesced in this certainty with a sigh; and then he thought—how could he help thinking?—of what, when he was a free agent, he would do.

The cottages were a very picturesque group of red roofs and antiquated brickwork, situated picturesquely among a clump of trees. It was a thousand pities to pull them down or do anything to them. They were always the first sketch made by every amateur artist who visited the neighbourhood, and they figured two or three times in the Academy every year under the title of “A picturesque nook,” “The homes of our forefathers,” “A hamlet in Blankshire,” &c. A rumour had been spread about in the neighbourhood that the cottages of Westgate were to be destroyed, and naturally the cottagers were up in arms. As Mr. Parke and Mr. Blotting were seen approaching, first one head and then another were seen at the doors, and finally a very old

woman, bent half-double with rheumatism, and with a head continually moving with the tremble of palsy, came out from one of the houses and confronted the gentlemen.

"You ain't a-going to do away with the cottages ; now don't ye say so," she said, following them wherever they went, keeping between them and the houses, as though her feeble guardianship could have done anything. "Oh, dearie, dearie! Gentlemen, don't meddle with the old places ; they'll tumble soon enough of themselves. Oh, don't ye touch the cottages, gentlemen!" she said.

"If we do anything to the cottages we'll build you new ones, and far better than these, with every convenience," said Mr. Blotting, to whom the picturesque told for nothing, and who would rather have had water laid on than all the red roofs in the world.

"We don't want no conveniences," said the old woman. "We 'as what suits us, and we don't want nothin' more. And what's it all for, gentlemen, as you're a-pulling of us down? Because the young lord dranked a lot of water when he didn't ought to, when he was all in a sweat with his walk? I told 'im not to, and I'd make him a cup of tea. But the young ones they never pay no attention. And oh, my good gentlemen, what's all the fuss about the young lord? He was one as was born to die, he was. Does any of our lads die of the water, them as drinks it every day? No, nor lasses either. They's used to it, and they's strong and well and plenty of air all their lives, and nothin' goes amiss with 'em. But yon young lord he's as weakly as a lamb in February. Just to look at his long thin legs and his white face, and you'd see there was naught that was solid in him. Don't you go and judge what's good for us by 'im. Why, that one would ne'er have had no strength not if he'd been born and bred at Westgate. It wasn't in 'im, and if it hadn't been one thing it would have been another. He was born to die, was that young lord. There was his mother afore him that was druv crazed by that tother lady as made a fuss about the baby coming. Lord, just think what a woman to have a baby as couldn't give her answer back, but went mad when she was talked to! I was at the Park at the time. I was in the laundry, and there wasn't one of us servants that didn't know."

"What does she mean?" said John.

"Nothing, I should say," cried Mr. Blotting. "Come, old lady, you've given no reason why we shouldn't pull down your old rookeries that are full of damp and dirt and the rot and mildew. Why, it would be far more comfortable for yourselves. You would be ten times better."

"Dirt yourself, mister," cried the old woman in high indignation. "Unless it's Sally Brown's, the woman at the corner, as isn't true Westgate, there ain't no dirt more than's natural. And as for the young lord, you was always told as you'd never rare him. And no more you haven't, and as for its being our well, as we drinks every day, it's none of our well. And you just let us alone, mister!" She turned instinctively to Mr. Blotting, as to the inferior person of the two, although, old and nearly blind, she did not recognize John.

"What's that story about the lady?" he said.

The old woman glared at him with her bleared eyes. "You just let our cottages alone, young gentleman," she said.

"It's not so easy as you think to mend matters," said Mr. Blotting. "I could have told you that. You'd better build your new cottages first, and turn them into them before you pull down the old huts."

"And let them die of typhoid in the meantime, like my poor boy."

"Well, if they will they will—and it's not you nor me that will stop them," said Blotting, who in the way of tenants great and small was no optimist. "They don't care for your conveniences or for what means health to others—but if there's any money going they would like their share of that."

John had tossed half-a-crown into the old woman's hand, who caught it with marvellous cleverness considering her bad sight and doubled-up figure, and he had not patience or tranquillity to do more. "We can send the surveyor," he said, "for you see, I can't be long absent without thinking something must have happened while I've been away. Let's go home."

Letitia wrote her letter, not to Mary but Agnes—though she had a much stronger aversion to Agnes than to her sister. It was short, guarded, telling merely the fact of Mar's illness, that it was very serious, that he was attended by two trained hospital nurses and under the special care of Dr. Barker, and that everything was done that could be done for him. She added no in-

visitation. "The doctor wishes me to write," she said, "as he thinks it very serious—and if anything further happens I will let you know. Of course you will use your discretion as to whether you communicate this to Mary or not. Probably she will not mind much—which will save her a great deal of grief, poor soul, in case things should turn out badly. He seems to have caught this fever the day you went away in such a hurry. He deserted us all and strolled off by himself into the park, and wore himself out. You will know best whether you said anything to the boy to upset him. He stopped, tired, at the houses at the Westgate, and asked for some water, which was given him from their well. Dr. Barker says this is quite enough to account for it. It is a relief to me amidst all our trouble that he did not get it from anything in my house." And she ended by repeating her promise to write again if there was "any change." Letitia felt that she could now say "my house" without hesitation. It was as good as her house now—her great restlessness was calmed down. She went on and wrote a number of letters telling the sad circumstances to her habitual correspondents, whom she informed that her poor young nephew Lord Frogmore was lying dying, with a great deal of emotion. She wrote very affectionately of Mar. It was easy now to say that he was a dear boy, though always very delicate, never able to do the things that the other boys did. "But he has twined himself very much round all our hearts," wrote Letitia, "and I don't know how to console the children, who adore him." She could say this without anger or any vivid feeling in the certainty that Mar was going to die. For the first time since she had known she completely approved of Mar. It was a sad thing, no doubt, but it was for the best. He never could have been able to enjoy life—the best that could have been looked for for him would have been an invalid existence, never to be depended upon: and he was such a good boy, so well prepared, looking forward to his release with such resignation and piety. Letitia almost made herself cry, she gave such a touching account of Mar. When she completed those letters she felt more calm than she had done for many a day. The feeling of suspense was gone. The doctor, she felt assured, would never have said so much if there had been any hope left. And now she could permit herself to entertain these thoughts which had visited her at intervals for years, and which she had not per-

mitted to dwell in her mind, thoughts captivating and attractive, of all the changes she would make and all the things she would do when she came into her kingdom. There were certain improvements to be made in this very house which she had always wanted, which she decided upon the very first time she ever came to the Park, while old Frogmore was still master of all. She had said to John on that occasion (though she was not much more than a bride at the time), "I shall change all the east wing and turn the library into a second drawing-room when we are here." John had bidden her hold her tongue, and asked how she knew they would ever be there? Frogmore, who was so strong, would probably outlive him, John said. But Mrs. John was sure that she knew better. And now how much had happened! It had seemed all to float from them and become impossible, and then again it had returned again to possibility, and now it was nearly come to pass. Very nearly! It was only a question of time now. Ten days or so and everything would be settled—at the furthest; if it was possible that he could hold out so long. She indulged herself by thinking it all out, how she could make those alterations. Many a time had the vision drifted across her eyes, but she never allowed herself to caress and indulge that vision. She thought not only of the alterations, but of a thousand things besides. The position would be so different. No critical observers to remark on what she did; it would be her own, to do what she pleased with. No narrowness of money to prevent this and that, to drive her into half measures and improvements incomplete. What she did she could do with confidence, knowing that when John's time was over (Letitia did not think that her own time might be over), her son would come after him. Everything would become legitimate and natural from the moment that this poor boy was mercifully removed to a better world. It would be better, far better for him: for he never could have had but a wretched invalid life in this world. And for everybody else how much better. The children would all have their rights—the privileges which Mary Hill had taken from them when she married old Frogmore. To have an Honourable to their name would be an advantage even for the girls. And their way of life would be so changed. Letitia went about the house lightly, with a changed countenance. Her suspense seemed over. It was not that the doctor had said anything more than he had said over and over

again; but she took it in a different way. Her mind was at rest. She spoke quietly to the people whom she saw, of the great sorrow that was hanging over the house. There was no doubt, and no pretence at any hope in her tones. Her confidence was extraordinary, as had been the rage of her suspense a little time before. She allowed herself to talk to John of the things that would have to be done, and he did not stop her. He said nothing himself, but he did not refuse to listen to her. Her certainty as to their changed positions impressed her husband with a sensation of certainty too. She had always been in the right, and there seemed no reason for doubting her now. The conviction was wrought in John's mind with a real sorrow for the dying boy. Poor Mar! To purchase advantage by the sacrifice of that innocent life was bitter to John—he still said to himself; and if by any effort of his he could save the poor child's life—but what could his efforts do when the doctors had given him up? And no doubt Letitia was right, and it became them to realize their position. He allowed himself to think of the alterations too.

And meantime Mar lay in a strange confusion, his faculties all dulled with his fever, the burning hours going over him, so that he knew not night from day, with kind hands ministering to him—but only the hands of strangers—and the minds of all about him gradually turning to a consideration of the life and the world beyond, in which he should have no part. There he lay, always patient, smiling still when he was roused from his stupor, drifting on to the end.

CHAPTER XLI.

LADY FROGMORE had hurried home when she left the Park the day after Duke's birthday, full of agitation and confused trouble, not knowing what ailed her, dissatisfied with herself and everything around, yet like a blind creature groping for what she knew not, a clue to guide her through the darkness. She fretted through all that day, impatient of the lingering of the trains and the long time of waiting at one junction and another.

"If I can but get home! I think I will never leave it again—one is safest at home," she said. When she reached that quiet house at last, embowered in its trees and little park, to the great surprise and even displeasure of the servants, who had hoped for

a holiday, she repeated the same sentiment, throwing herself down with a sigh of satisfaction on a sofa in her pleasant drawing-room. "One is safest at home!"

"Dear Mary," said Agnes, whose nerves were fretted and her temper overcast, so that she could not take this unreasonable satisfaction with the calm she usually showed, "you are safe enough anywhere. Who would interfere with you? England is not like a wild country where people are in danger when they move."

Agnes had not been able to show her usual tolerance during this day. It had been very harassing and disagreeable to her, and the very fact of making all things easy for Mary, so that there should be nothing to distract her, reacted upon her guardian and gave Agnes much more annoyance and trouble than an ordinary traveller. And she had hoped to spend so much of this day with Mar, finding her way again into his confidence, drawing back to her tender bosom the child to whom she had been a mother. Poor Agnes! She had looked forward to it so long, and now it had come to so sudden an end—all for nothing, she said to herself, in her weariness and discouragement; for the hope that had sustained her of a revolution in Mary's shadowed intelligence seemed to float away in the childish content with which she contemplated the external comforts of home. Agnes knew, too, from the glances thrown at her in passing that she would have a sullen household to manage—for to look for a week of ease and relaxation in the absence of "the family," and then to have their capricious mistresses return upon their hands in a day, was too much for the flesh and blood of a house full of English servants. It was not wonderful if Miss Hill, deprived of her holiday too, and accustomed to stand between her sister and all annoyances, should lose heart a little at the end of this weary day.

"I shall never leave home again," said Mary in her gentle voice; "I am not fit to leave home. Everything seems right now that we are back. Even my dear old lord looks at me as if he were better pleased."

"It does not seem so to me," said Agnes. "I know that he would have wished you to stay."

Lady Frogmore looked up at her sister with a mild surprise.

"Do not scold me," she said. "I would have done it if I could."

For you, dear, if not for anything else. And to please poor Letitia——”

“Oh Mary, Letitia!”

“You are very hard upon her,” said Mary. “She is like me, she has been disappointed. She has not had what she might have expected. Oh, don’t ask me how, for it turns me all wrong. I have never understood it, and I never shall understand it. Keep me away from them, Agnes; keep me away from them. Don’t make me think and think. My head turns round, but I never get any clearer. Oh, don’t ask me to go there again.”

She put her hands together like a child and turned her mild eyes to her sister’s with more than a child’s passion of entreaty in them. How hard it is to fathom the mysteries of a mind thus veiled by heavy misadventure and injury, cut off in fact from the record of its own life! Mary had been roused to think; she had been startled out of her calm; but all fruitlessly: only enough to make her brain swim and fill her being with confusion and mental pain. She clung to the quiet which was in her secluded home. She felt when she entered it again as if she had escaped from all that could shake and startle her. The strange commotion that had arisen within her when Mar rose in the rustic assembly, when he spoke with a voice which was familiar, yet unfamiliar, full of echoes of dead voices, and which had struck to her very heart, she knew not how, had been like a terrible storm to Mary. She could not find her way among the vague thinkings that were all stirred up within her—broken recollections, suggestions, an indistinct new world which was at the same time old. A little more and she might have caught the clue, found the key, touched the spring that would bring light upon the darkness. But she was not capable of the effort, and the stir of the roused thoughts, like the wings of a crowd of frightened birds disturbed by a strange light, had deafened and dazed her. “Don’t make me think and think.” It was the most pathetic appeal of weakness.

Agnes could not resist that tremulous call. She went to her sister and kissed her tenderly. “I will not trouble you more. I will never trouble you more,” she said with tears. It seemed to be giving up Mar’s cause—but Mar was young and had all the world before him. Even if it never came to him, that recognition from his mother, which the boy, who did not know his mother, could have at the most but a visionary desire for—it could not

harm him much ; it would interfere with none of his rights nor with his personal happiness. But poor Mary's calm and subdued life might be shattered if she were pushed too far. The delusions in which she lived, which sufficed for her, might be destroyed—her quiet banished without any greater good being attained. Agnes gave up a cherished hope when she gave her sister that kiss. She would disturb her no more. Better that she should live and die in this seclusion that suited her, and please herself with a number of innocent things, and do her gentle charities, and smile and be happy in her own subdued way, than forced to search again in the dimness of her confused being, and to wreck her peace—probably for nothing. Agnes gave up her hopes as she yielded, in the weariness of that summer evening. She knew as little that events were occurring that very day which might make it entirely unimportant whether Mary ever recovered her complete understanding or not, as she did that a vague light had already been established in Mary's confused mind, which would not be quenched again. She gave up consciously all attempts to lead that sealed mind to clearer understanding, and doing so with a pang of resignation, seemed to bury for herself all the brighter hopes that had still survived within her—hopes which had supported her through many a troubled and monotonous year.

The Dower House was at the other side of the county, as has been said, and further off from the Park than if it had been twice as far in a more direct way. It stood on the corner of a little property, one of the portions of the estate which had been longest in the hands of the family, six or seven miles from the nearest railway station, with nothing more important than a large village near. The chief society which the two ladies had was in this village, about the outskirts of which were a few "good houses"—respectable, solid dwellings with "grounds," not sufficiently dignified to be country places, but superior to the ordinary villa or village mansion—where there lived a few retired people, a soldier or two, Indian officials on pensions, and such like, who, with the addition of the clergy and the doctor, formed the higher classes of Doveton. Lady Frogmore was much thought of in this little society. Her story, which every one knew more or less, but about which there was always a considerable mystery, her gentleness and kindness, and not least her rank, made her always interesting to her neighbours and notwithstanding her own complete retire-

ment, their little neighbourly tea parties and garden parties were not disagreeable to Mary. She would go nowhere in the evening ; but to sit for an hour in a neighbour's garden and see the young people amuse themselves and listen to the talk of the elders—which was of a calm description, not exciting, and in which it was very unlikely that there could arise any question likely to touch her too keenly—was pleasant enough.

For some weeks after her return home she would go nowhere, and her absence made a blank to the good people about, who liked to put Lady Frogmore's name in their list of guests and quote the very simple things that Mary had said ; but as it happened, about the time when Letitia had made up her mind with certainty as to what was going to take place, and acting under the doctor's order had sent a letter to warn Mar's relations of the state in which he lay, Lady Frogmore and Miss Hill, much entreated, had consented to be present at a garden party at General Forsyth's, who had the nearest house to theirs. They were able to walk over, as it was near, and the general's children had grown up since Lady Frogmore came to the Dower House, and were supposed to be favourites of the ever kind but often shrinking woman, who smiled tenderly upon them, but avoided and evaded, no one knew why, all near approach.

It was one of the scenes so familiar now in English country life. A pretty scene enough if too common to be notable. Young women and young men in their flower of youth and spirit, not as in the old fashion, too busy even for flirtation, contending in the lists of tennis, a little flushed, a little careless with exercise and the struggle for the mastery—talking as well as playing the game ; while the fathers and mothers sat or strolled about, half watching, more than half occupied with their own discussions. Mary was received with open arms, placed in the best place, surrounded by a crowd of anxious courtiers who asked to be allowed to bring her tea or ice or claret cup, or anything that in such circumstances a lady could desire. Miss Hill was not so popular, for one thing because she was not Lady Frogmore, but also because Agnes was not so "sweet" as her poor sister, and with her preoccupied mind and many cares responded less graciously to the compliments addressed to her. Miss Hill was allowed to settle herself where she pleased, and this was easily discovered by one of the neighbouring clergy, who came up to her with an air of special

cordiality, and said as he shook hands, "I am delighted to see you here. It shows how little truth there is in the rumours that one hears about young Lord Frogmore."

"About Frogmore!" cried Agnes—she had not been listening very closely until that name suddenly brought the blood to her face. "What do you know about Frogmore?"

The clergyman, surprised by her surprise, hesitated a little, but finally informed her that he had been lately at Ridding, which was the county town, and there he had heard a very alarming account—that Lord Frogmore was down with fever of the worst kind, caught during a visit to some old cottages which had been allowed to get into a dreadful state of neglect on his property, and that his life was despaired of. Dr. Barker was in constant attendance upon him, it was said, and every one knew Dr. Barker was too busy a man to make too much of a trifling illness. "I am only telling you what I heard," said the rector, "for of course you must know better, and it was, I confess, a great relief to my mind to see you. If he were really so ill you would not have been here——"

"I am afraid," said Agnes, "that is not so true as it appears. We keep up but very little correspondence. All the same," she cried to herself, rather than to her companion, "Letitia must have written, surely she must have written if Mar had been very ill. He is always delicate," she said.

"So I have heard."

"And you are sure it was more than that—you are sure there was something definite talked of—a fever? Oh," cried Agnes, "for the love of heaven tell me everything you know."

"I have told you everything I know, dear Miss Hill. I am very, very sorry to have made you anxious. All that must have been an exaggeration at least. You must have heard."

"Letitia could not—she could not—oh, even she could not—" cried Agnes, with great agitation—"and yet who can tell? She might say what was the use? Oh, forgive me. What you have said has made me very anxious. Typhoid fever has a horrible sound. It takes the courage out of one's heart."

"What I heard must have been an exaggeration," said the clergyman. "I wish I had not told you. People are so fond of adding a little to a piece of news. Anything to make a sensation.

I daresay it is only a common cold or something unimportant. You will not tell Lady Frogmore?"

"Will you see if our carriage is there?" Agnes said.

She felt as if she was tottering as she walked. She could not keep on her feet. Anxiety had seized upon her like a vulture, placing all its claws in her flesh. She sat down on the nearest vacant chair, where she was exposed to the conversation of another guest, a lady who did not know many people, and who accordingly flung herself upon the person who seemed to have taken that seat out of kind consideration to make the solitary lady talk. But Agnes was beyond those *ménagements* of civility which she would have adopted in another case. When she had recovered a little, without observing that she was being talked to, thinking over this dreadful piece of information did not make it less but more grave. Mar had not written to her, which already had made her vaguely anxious. And who in that house would think of it? Who would take the trouble? Agnes had not the habit of those modern ways to which so many of us fly in a moment of anxiety. She did not think of the telegraph. She turned over in her distressed mind many things that she would do, but not that. She would write to Dr. Barker—she would go to him, or to the Park, where at least a servant would tell her the truth. But it was already evening, and how could she go so late? and how could she live through the dreadful night without knowing? and how could she disentangle Mary from those smiling groups, and persuade her to come home and explain to her what she wanted—what she must do? The sudden alarm, without warning, without preparation—the wild, sudden panic and horror, like the shadow of death descending in a moment over her—took from her all power of thought. When at last she was able to reach the spot where Mary sat, it was almost impossible to get her attention. Lady Frogmore was listening patiently to her neighbours, with all their little stories of the parish and village. She said little herself. That was one reason why they liked her so. She listened to everybody except to Agnes, who had at last got to the back of her chair, and who was too much herself—the other half of herself—to call her exquisite politeness forth.

"Mary, the carriage is here, and it is getting late."

Mary gave her sister a little nod and sat still, listening to Mrs.

Brotherton's account of the measles, with which all her children had been "down."

"Mary, couldn't you come away now? The Howards have gone away already, and the Thomsons. And the grass is damp, and the dew beginning to fall."

"Presently," she said, with another look and nod. And now some one else had got possession of her ear.

Agnes went on whispering entreaties; but how was Mary to know there was any urgency in them more than on any other afternoon? She cried at last, in desperation:

"I am ill—I am feeling very ill. For God's sake, Mary, come away."

Lady Frogmore only waited to hear the last of what the vicar's wife was saying, and then she rose hastily and drew Agnes's arm into her own.

"My dear," she said, "why did you not tell me you had a headache before?"

(To be continued.)

In Shakespeare's Town.

By ETHEL F. HEDDLE.

WE had one of the loveliest days in the lovely month of May for our visit to Shakespeare's home. Apple and pear blossom, pink, exquisite, white and frothy, seemed everywhere, the meadows were green as they only are in May, and the lilacs were just breaking into bloom in the garden next Shakespeare's house when we walked from the station and came at last into the quiet little street in which England's master mind was born. We waited a little, standing opposite, to look at the little dark half-timbered house—dark it seemed with the frowns of many winters—and then we crossed over and rang the heavy hanging bell.

The old ladies, the Misses Chataway, who previously acted as custodians, are dead now, and in their place are a man and his wife from Newcastle; it was the wife who took us into the "living room," and afterwards upstairs. "Remember, there is very little to see," some one had said to us, and the words came back to my mind as we stood in the dark room below and afterwards upstairs. "Little to see" perhaps depends upon the eyes that see! Up the very stairs he trod as a child, and into what they call "the birth-room," where the baby Shakespeare drew his first breath! The lattice window is swung back on its rusty and worn iron hook, letting in the sweet summer air, and one can look out into the quiet street. This is the very window to which Mary Arden must have carried her child, and from which the poet's hazel eyes looked out first into the world. There is little furniture in the room. While the patient custodian waits, talking a little now and then, we stand by the window and by the fireplace, and we try to realize it all. We do not say much and we do not examine the signatures on the wall nor on the "actors' pillar." Even the scrawled "W. Scott" on one pane of the window does not excite any wild enthusiasm. We do not want to think of any here but one—not even Walter Scott. In this very room Mary Arden hushed her baby to rest, held him close in her tender arms, bent above his sleeping face, dreamt of what he would do when he was

a man! Shakespeare's mother must have been no common woman if it be true that great men derive their talents from their mothers, and yet we hear very little that is thought, or written, or surmised about the woman in whose arms he was cradled. I should like to know of her even more than of Anne Hathaway.

The poet's bust regards us benignly from an oak table in one corner as the custodian takes us to the next room, where what is thought to be the best picture of the poet is locked up nightly in a fire-proof case. She does not hurry us away exactly, but she waits resignedly, and one can but sigh and go. We may spend as long as we like in the museum of relics which leads from the "living room," but the museum of relics, interesting as it is, does not fascinate as does that room upstairs. To think the floor one treads, and that twenty-five thousand people trod last year because of Shakespeare, is the very floor on which he took his first unconscious baby steps! We go over the relics one by one—the desk from the Stratford school, an oak table said to have belonged to the Shakespeares, letters, books and many pictures—and then we pass out into the sunshine again. It seems to me that one cannot express what the little house means. To a Shakespeare lover it must be seen to be understood.

And now across the green fields of Shottery to Anne Hathaway's cottage. We go by a little footpath interspersed with stiles, and across the fields one sees nestling cottages and pink masses of apple blossom, and the meadows are white with daisies. Schoolboys, chatting of cricket, pass us, and three little children are sitting by one of the stiles and presently roll blissfully on the grass and shout with glee as they gather the daisies. Everything is very still; one hears no sound from the little town, and the May evening falls softly over the fields. I am wondering if Shakespeare came here often after the day's work was over, walking slowly with head bent, and that marvellous mind far away in other lands and realms. One likes to weave dreams of Shakespeare's wooing and of his love, because one knows so little of either. My own particular fancy is that Anne was a rosy-cheeked, smiling, matter-of-fact country woman, who won the lad's fancy by her ready sympathy and placid, easy ways. I imagine, though not understanding him at all, that she *rested* him—that the very maternal tenderness which was in her love suited him then better than any strong passion. I fancy that he walked

over these peaceful fields to the orchard by the Hathaways' house, where he found Anne standing under the heavily-laden fruit trees, perhaps sorting the apples into piles, the ruddy colour not more rich on them than on her own sweet country face. And Shakespeare, who dreamt by day of queens and kings, who looked into Constance's wide-eyed agony, who smiled when Rosalind's silvery laugh echoed in his ear, who bent above the dead faces of Cordelia and Ophelia and Juliet—Shakespeare, who talked with imperial Cleopatra, and Katharine, and Portia—turned now in the pale evening light to rosy-faced Anne, standing in her cotton gown by the lichen-covered trunks of the trees, and loved her! Surely he loved her, then, and later? I do not think she understood him. I am sure she did not. He found that out afterwards, when they were married, and he went to the busy metropolis to win name and fame alone. She was not the very soul of his soul, the very life of his life, or he could not have lived without her companionship amidst the carking cares of his stage and author's career; and yet in the end he came back to Stratford and Anne, and perhaps found that after all the old *rest* of her presence and love was strangely sweet. She would *never* understand him, but she was the sweet wife of his young love, the mother of his children, and her tender hands were held out to him as gladly now as under the apple trees when she saw the boy-lover Will coming to greet her.

But I have strayed far away from the cottage. It is thatched and embowered in creepers and roses and woodbine, and the flowers that the poet loved are beginning to bloom in the little patch of garden in front—"pansies for thought" and daisies. The gentle owner of the house, who is a lineal descendant of Anne's, gives us a yellow pansy by-and-by, when we bid her farewell. In the little low kitchen they show us the old worm-eaten settle where the lovers sat, and they tell us that is the very window from which they looked. The kitchen is quaint and dark, and arranged as homely people love to arrange their rooms. There is the oddest little shrine to the poet on the dresser, for his bust is surrounded by shells, a mortar box, and a china swan, from which curious medley the placid face seems almost to smile into yours. Upstairs there is an oak bed which belonged, they say, to Anne, and here, too, is a carved box and some very fine linen embroidered by some member of the

Hathaways. They were well-to-do farmers, Anne's people, possessing the greater part of Shottery, and richer than the Shakespeares. Tradition has it that Anne returned here when her husband went to London, and only left it for the glories of the new place when he returned, rich and prosperous, to buy land in his native town.

And now across the fields again, and we have left the sweetest place in Stratford ; we see the thatched roofs fade into distance with a sigh, wondering if the poet sighed too, as he left Shottery and Anne for the steep path of fame and wealth.

Much has been written of the church in which the poet lies buried, and of the tomb under which all that is mortal of him rests. When we visited it, the chancel was undergoing repairs ; we longed for the workmen's talk and the sound of their careless footsteps to cease, though we were permitted to stand and look up at the painted bust in peace, and from it to the flat stone where the famous verse is inscribed. Anne, Judith and Mrs. Hall rest beside him, under the grey stones, and next his there is only one monument on the wall.

It is to the memory of Richard and Judith Combe, and the inscription tells us that Judith died just before her marriage ; her lover, "in testimony of his vanished love," erected the monument, and the lines go on to relate the pathetic little history in words that have a simplicity and a tenderness all their own. "She took her last leave of this life the 17th day of August, 1649, in ye arms of him who most entirely loved and was loved by her even to ye very death."

The pair are represented together, their hands clasped and one of Judith's resting on a skull. One feels that for their love's sake, perfect and immortal, and looking beyond the shadows of life to the pure light of heaven, they are worthy to rest beside the man who wrote of love as never mortal wrote before.

We read the verse again on the grey stone, gentle in its entreaty, awful in its denunciation, in which he blesses those who leave him to rest by the murmurings of Avon, and curses any who would take him from the spot where Anne and his children sleep, and then, after one long look into the calm unseeing eyes of the bust, looking, it seems, unfalteringly down the long ages, we move away. The American window is not deeply interesting, nor the history of the church re-decoration ; we would even

prefer that our neighbours from across the ocean were not begged from so persistently, and informed on printed placards that still another window remains to be filled. Surely Great and Greater Britain can make this hallowed spot a fit resting-place, without stooping to ask from even generous America! Is it quite worthy of England, and of her debt to Shakespeare? We remember that a butcher sold his meat in the little house where the poet was born, till forty years ago, and that only Mr. Barnum's bid of £2,500, so that he might carry it off to America, roused us to a sense of our position and our duty. England was just in time! We are a strange nation, in our fits of apathy and indifference, as in our sudden spasms of sentiment and admiration, and if the Shakespeare fever is high now, and the tide of loving admiration brings thousands yearly to the little town, we remember Barnum and the butcher, and we refrain from pride and vainglory.

But the sun is setting over the rippling water of the Avon, and the long shadows of the stately elms are stretched out on the grass beyond, the handsome theatre is passed, and we are nearing the little modern station.

It has been a day never to be forgotten, over which to dream and dream, as one bends over the faded daisy heads we gathered in the Shottery fields.

To dream is not forbidden, nor to weave one's fancy pictures around Anne's love-lit eyes and about the wonderful face that must have looked out dreamily from the little lattice window in High Street, but, after all, I am glad that we dream and do not *know*. For,

"Others abide our question. Thou art free.
We ask and ask: thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge."

We are glad that there are some lives "unguessed at"—which biographers, moralists, and historians hesitate to handle, for they, being dead, yet speak in a language that can never perish. Such a life is Shakespeare's, ended as it began, in the peace of his native meadows and very far from the fierce light that would shine upon the throne of genius.

He smiles, and is still. "Out-topping knowledge."

The Tree-Devil.

By MRS. FRANK PENNY,
Author of "CASTE AND CREED," etc.

"The startled bats flew out—bird after bird—
The screech-owl overhead began to flutter,
And seem'd to mock the cry that she had heard
Some dying victim utter."

HOOD.

"What, man! Defy the devil: consider, he's an enemy to mankind."
Twelfth Night.

"PUT the bed there—*there!*" I said, pointing with my finger to the exact spot in the verandah where I wished it to be.

The servants, led by the old ayah, hesitated.

"What are you waiting for? Bring the cot *here.*" And I walked forward to the only airy corner of the bungalow.

They did not move. To try my temper still more, the two men who carried the cot set it down, and deliberately stood at ease. The ayah, a woman who had been with me for years and who had nursed me and my babies with infinite care and tenderness, came towards me.

"What is the meaning of all this?" I asked with impatience. "Why don't you make the men do as I tell them?"

The woman's face assumed an anxious look, and her eyes sought mine in mute appeal. I laid my hand on her shoulder and gave her a gentle shake.

"Bring that cot *here.*"

"Missus!—please missus! not here! Not good for the children. This air bad air. Missus sleep in the house."

"I tell you I won't. It is hot and close in the house, and there isn't a single punkah in the place. Look at the roof: it has no ceiling cloths, and must be full of snakes and rats. I *won't* sleep in the house. Bring the beds here, and put up the mosquito nets."

With the exasperating mulish obstinacy of a native servant, she stood as stolid as a rock under my orders.

"I tell boys to put the cots on the other side of the bungalow," she exclaimed suddenly, brightening up as the new solution of the difficulty presented itself to her mind.

"What! All amongst the pots and pans, the coolies and the bullock-carts. No! I am not going to sleep amongst such a dirty lot. Ayah," I said very seriously, "you don't generally disobey me in this way. Tell me what you mean by it. *Why* am I not to sleep here?"

She was silent; but compelled by the almost fierce gaze under which I held her, she whispered:

"That tree bad tree!"

She turned a frightened glance on the magnificent banyan that stretched its long, smooth, snake-like branches against the fiery sunset sky. Its many stems formed a small grove by the side of the bungalow, and its broad, glistening leaves spread a network of foliage above. It was a tent built by nature's own hand, and fit for a king. I was surprised to notice that it was unappropriated by the drivers of my carts and their bullocks. Usually they gladly availed themselves of such noble forest shelter. In the present instance they preferred, without exception, the bare, open space on the opposite side of the bungalow, where there was neither cooling breeze nor shelter from the morning dew.

A little eddy of wind brushed through the twisted grey stems as we stood there, carrying with it a whirl of dry, crackling leaves. The ayah shuddered and murmured "Swami!" below her breath.

"What is wrong with the tree?" I demanded.

She approached yet nearer, and whispered very low in my ear—so low that I could scarcely catch the words:

"Devil in that tree."

I drew back in absolute wrath.

"You old fool! You, a Christian woman, believing in such heathen rubbish! You know as well as I do that there are no such things as pishashas."

She was abashed at my words, and began to look ashamed of herself. She alluded no more to the devil in the tree, but harped back to her first objection.

"Not good for the children to sleep here. Wind blowing in the night, bring fever—dysentery."

"At this time of the year! Nonsense! The tree will keep off the dew and shade us from the moon. Now come; waste no more time in such foolish talk. Bring the cots—mine and the children's—at once."

Very sullenly she obeyed me. The men who carried the heavy old teakwood bedsteads out of the bungalow turned fearful glances on the tree; they also looked curiously at the Englishwoman who dared to brave the anger of the devil.

The bungalow was one belonging to the forest officers of the Tinnevely District in South India. I, the wife of one of the senior men, was moving by easy stages across-country to the sea-coast for change of air. My husband did not accompany me. Duty called him elsewhere. I was perfectly safe in the hands of his people, and well supplied with fowls, milk and bread at each stage. I might have travelled faster had I chosen to make longer journeys, but with two small children I decided that short stages were best; hence I found myself at this bungalow, which was seldom used. A new one had been built at a station only six miles further on. Six miles meant two hours more on the road, and in the increasing heat of the day I had not cared to do it.

I brought my own servants and kit with me, and was therefore independent to a great extent of *dāk* bungalows. All I needed was some sort of a roof over my head to protect me from the sun in the day, and cots to sleep upon at night. Camp-tables and chairs I carried with me, besides camp crockery and cooking utensils.

More than once during the ten days of travel I had slept with my children in the open air under the sheltering foliage of the tamarind or banyan. To-night I did not propose to have the beds carried out under the tree, but only asked to have them placed at the corner of the open wide verandah next the tree.

My orders were at last obeyed and the beds put into position. The elder child was to occupy the inner one, and I, with my baby of nearly two years old, was to sleep in that nearest the tree.

The children had their supper and were put to bed. The heat of the day was giving place to the cool night wind which blew in off the sea, distant about thirty miles. I fancied I could smell

the salt water and the seaweed already. My spirits revived within me as I thought of the pleasant change in store for us all. Fresh fish every day, fresh oysters and prawns ; fresh breezes and salt-water baths to put a little strength into the pallid, flabby limbs of my little ones.

I put on an easy tea-gown, hunted up the third volume of an interesting novel, and sat down to dinner. I read as I ate, and the story helped to make me forget that in spite of the rather imposing menu, I was swallowing in each dish the everlasting chicken—first in cockaleekie soup, secondly in white fricassee, thirdly in rissoles, fourthly in roast fowl, fifthly in curry. A dish of plantain fritters—people in England know plantains better as bananas—served as the pudding course, and plantains did duty for dessert.

"Clear away," I said, rising from the table and dropping into my long folding canvas chair. "Bring me a cup of weak tea, and then you may all go to bed. Leave the lantern in the verandah, David, and mind that you wake the men in good time so that we get off at five."

"Yes, ma'am."

He paused by my chair as though he wished to speak.

"Well?"

"I think missus will find it plenty cold over there," indicating the corner where the beds were placed, and where the children were now fast asleep.

"Nonsense ; I know best. Now go and finish your work, David, and don't trouble about me. If I want you I will call you."

"I sleep on that side," he replied, pointing to where the bullocks and their drivers were quartered.

"Very well, I will send ayah to wake you at the right time."

I took up my book.

"You can go," I said as my eyes sought the page again.

He turned away without another word and busied himself over the dinner-table. Once he whispered to the ayah as she passed to her evening meal ; she replied, but I was too much interested in my book to heed what they were saying. When the table was cleared he brought me my tea. After putting the cup down on the little round table by my lamp, he fetched the lantern and went

out towards the tree. I wondered what he was going to do. He walked slowly round it, making a large circle. The dead leaves crackled beneath his feet as he brought each foot heavily down upon the dry earth. This was to frighten the snakes away. I lost sight of him in the darkness, but I could see his lamp bobbing about on the other side, as though he were examining the locality by the aid of its light. When he returned I handed him my empty cup.

"Plenty rubbish over there," he remarked; "I send sweeper to clear away."

"Oh, go and eat your rice and don't bother about that tree!" I replied, impatiently.

He left me and I read on. It was a very lonely spot, but I had no fear. I was as little afraid of robbers or of wild animals as if I had been in my own drawing-room. The quiet of the evening was only broken by the whirring and grinding of the cicalas in the jungle beyond the banyan. By-and-by the jackal would doubtless raise his melancholy wail in his traditional cry for a dead Hindoo—o—o! But he was a very familiar neighbour by this time. I had learnt to sleep peacefully through his querulous cry of where! where! where! unless, indeed, he chose to look for his dead Hindoo under my bed, which had happened once on the journey; then I arose in murderous wrath and flung a slipper at his slinking form as he sneaked off to his companions.

I read on, absorbed in the love troubles of the heroine, without heeding the time. Suddenly a sharp scream startled me; it more than startled me—for the moment it terrified me. It was like nothing less than the agonized cry of a woman undergoing the process of having her throat cut in slow deliberate inches. In another second I laughed. It was a bird, a kind of night-jar, commonly known as the devil-bird. I had heard it once before; and, having heard it, it was impossible to forget the fiendish cry as it rent the air. This bird to-night had uttered his discordant note in the banyan tree itself close at hand; and though knowledge soothed my suddenly awakened fears, yet my heart still beat in quick pulsations, even as I laughed the laugh of happy reassurance.

I listened for the answering call of its mate. From the distance came the responsive shriek. A heavy flapping of wings told me that the ghastly owl had gone to join its companions.

I sincerely hoped that the two would find pressing business in the opposite direction, and not trouble the neighbourhood of the bungalow again with playful imitations of the cries of murdered women.

There was a stir amongst my servants and followers. I could easily guess at the terror which had struck their hearts. To them it would be the malignant call of the tree-spirit.

I got up and entered the house to perform my toilette. In spite of open doors and windows, the rooms felt hot and ill-ventilated; and how the place smelt of bats! It must have been years since the walls had known the cleansing whitewashers' brush. The rafters and beams which supported the thatched roof were coated with dust; and huge bats fluttered amongst the ragged reeds of the thatch.

I hurriedly put myself into my night garments and a flannel dressing-gown; then, turning down my lamp, I went out into the cool fresh verandah and crept beneath the mosquito curtains. My little son was sleeping soundly. The ayah's mat and pillow lay on the floor at the foot of the cot. As soon as she had finished her chat with the cook and the butler round the camp fire, she would come to bed.

Perfectly easy in my mind I lay down and gazed out at the bright star-lit sky. The moon would not rise till midnight. How beautiful it was! There was a large planet, as white and steady in its light as a small moon, illuminating a patch of sky seen through the foliage of the banyan. The network of branches and leaves reminded me of gigantic lace work, and the many stems which supported the wonderful canopy seemed like a crowd of slender long-limbed giants sheltering beneath it.

Surely that was a fire-fly flitting over the carpet of dry crisp leaves. No! its flight was too steady, too systematic. It could be nothing but a lantern carried by a man's hand. Yes. There was the sound of cautious feet amongst the dead leaves, and the whisper of several voices.

What could my men be about? Surely David was not so foolish as to extemporize a gang of sweepers at this time of night to clear away the rubbish. And what a dust he would raise! Stupid fellow! If I had not changed into my night clothes, I would go and order them all to their beds.

Hark! What was that? The cry of a fowl.

"Cluck! cluck! cak! cak! ca—" Its frightened cry was stifled by a strong hand.

The beauty of nature was marred by death. The stars no longer seemed so pure and lovely; the night wind was soft and balmy no more.

Another cry! "Ba'a! Ba'a!" A blow. Again death marred the repose of the night.

I shuddered. The poor goat which had just suffered was probably to provide me with so-called mutton to-morrow. It was really too bad of David to allow these creatures to be slaughtered before my eyes. One must eat to live; but I had often told the cook that all signs of his detestable work must be scrupulously hidden from me and the children.

The lights multiplied; more lamps glimmered under the tree, and a fire was being made.

This was intolerable. It was the last straw to my endurance. The night breeze set in from that direction and I should get all the abominable smoke.

I rose up from my bed, put on my slippers and went down the broad verandah steps. I could see quite a number of men grouped by the tree. They were not cooking their evening meal, for that had been disposed of long ago, round the camp fires. Cook was not to blame; that was quite certain; these people were my cart-men and the family of the man who had charge of the bungalow.

Tiresome, provoking creatures! They were holding a heathen function and were worshipping the tree-devil. Such being the case, it was impossible to stop them or interfere with them in any way. I must make up my mind to an hour's wakefulness, and think myself fortunate if everything became quiet again at the end of that time. The shriek of the night-jar had roused them to this sudden activity in religious ceremony. To them it was the angry cry of the devil.

I moved into the shade, and stood against one of the out-standing stems which supported a huge spreading limb overhead. I could see without being seen.

There was a small devil-stone—a shapeless mass of black gneiss—set up against the parent trunk of the tree. Before it was erected a low platform of brick and mud—the work of bygone

generations of worshippers. On this platform burnt some small lamps, merely flaming wicks of cotton floating on pans of oil. Immediately in front of the stone lay the bleeding heads of the fowl and goat, together with leaf platters of rice, sugar, butter, curry-stuffs and cocoanut.

A cautious step behind startled me. It was the ayah. She plucked at my skirt and drew me back.

"Why have they begun all this nonsense to-night?" I asked.

"Missus hear that devil-bird? Those men plenty frightened. They say devil grumbling, got nothing to eat. But if they see missus, they will be more frightened—perhaps they will run away. Because missus spoil poojah. How should we get on to-morrow without bullocks and drivers?" she added, seeing that I was not inclined at first to move.

Her last suggestion had the desired effect. It would be very awkward indeed if my means of locomotion forsook me. I returned to the verandah.

"That devil, very bad mischief devil, these men say——"

"There *is* no devil in that tree," I cried, interrupting her.

She shrugged her shoulders, implying ignorance on her part and disbelief. The old woman prided herself on her Christianity, and often spoke contemptuously of the heathen and their practices. She and the butler would have scorned the notion of taking part in any heathen worship.

Yet so deeply rooted are the superstitions of the country that even the educated class of servants—Christian though they may be—cannot wholly divest their minds of belief in the pishashas. They are as much a possible reality to them as the ghost is to the imaginative Englishwoman. Indeed, the pishasha is a kind of ghost. It is the spirit of a man who has led a wicked evil life on earth. Obligated by his sins to haunt the neighbourhood after death where they were committed, he is supposed to take awful, monstrous forms, and to find pleasure in nothing but vindictiveness and spite. The spirit must be propitiated, or dire calamity will befall the people who live in its vicinity; fire, accident, sickness, death—all are put down to the door of some evil demon, rather than to the gross carelessness of humanity.

The ayah corrected herself. "Those men *say* that the devil is bad. I don't know. I know nothing. I'm Christian woman.

But if those bandymen think devil is angry still, they will all run away to-night."

The muffled sound of the tomtom commenced. It was not unlike the beat of a horny hand upon an old oil-tin. Possibly one of my own tins had been pressed into service. Then followed a monotonous nasal chanting, diversified with occasional low propitiatory cries.

"How long will they go on with that folly?"

"One hour, two hours, and then they will go to sleep."

"Then I must go to bed and try to sleep as best I can," I murmured.

The sounds were familiar enough, for, in the South of India, the air is filled at times with the beat of the tomtom.

"Lie down, ayah, and go to sleep."

With the instinctive solicitude of her nature she looked at the elder child; tucked it up still more securely in its mosquito net, and turned to the baby. The little man was restless and hot; he tossed in his sleep and flung his arms about. She patted him softly till his sleep deepened into stillness. Then she wrapped herself in her sheet, head, arms and feet, till she looked like a swathed mummy, and laid herself down on her mat.

The sounds of the chanting and tomtoming continued with monotonous regularity. I turned my back on the tree and very shortly fell into sound healthy slumber.

I do not dream often, but I did that night. I dreamt that one of my cartmen had got the old ayah on her knees before his disgusting swami-stone, and was deliberately hacking her head off with a blunt knife. The scream that she gave broke the dream and restored me to consciousness. In a moment I was awake, every particle of sleep dissipated. I sat up in bed and gazed uneasily around. It was not only the dream that had aroused me. There must have been something else.

Ah! of course! the devil-bird again.

At the foot of my bed knelt the ayah, her terrified face raised to mine. She was speechless with fright, and showed more whites of her eyes than I thought it possible for her to possess; without turning her head she rolled her eyes round in the direction of the tree from whence the sound had come.

I was afraid she would have a fit. I jumped out of bed, throwing the mosquito curtains up on the frame above. The moon

had risen, but did not shed much light, and my lamp had burnt out.

"Ayah! ayah! don't look so terrified. It is only the owl again."

I forbore to call it by its more familiar name.

She rose to her feet.

"I will call the butler," she gasped, shuffling off in the direction of the servants' quarters.

I took up the lamp and hurried after her.

"Here, get this lighted again. Hallo! What's that?"

Some animal passed out of the house just in front of the ayah. She saw it and stood still, paralyzed with fear. It went slowly down the steps towards the tree.

"It is only a jackal," I said reassuringly. "Come, ayah, don't be so frightened. You are not generally afraid of jackals."

"That's no jackal," she replied in a hoarse whisper.

The poor woman trembled so that she could scarcely speak.

The animal did not seem to fear the sound of human voices, for we could hear its feet among the dead leaves. It was scratching the ground. It might have been a dog; but whether dog or jackal I did not feel disposed to let it remain so close to the house. I ran down the steps towards it.

"Shoo! shoo!" I cried. "Get out, you beast!" and I stooped to pick up in pantomime the fear-inspiring stone, of which all creatures, from the blundering buffalo to the impudent crow, have an instinctive terror.

It did not move away. The scratching continued, and in the chequered moonlight I could see that it was larger and stronger than an ordinary jackal. I was not in the least alarmed, for I knew that no dangerous animals were to be found in that district. I ran back into the verandah, put on my slippers and seized my sun umbrella—a strong stick substantially petticoated in double cotton. Out I went again.

"Shoo! shoo! shoo! Go away!" at the top of my voice.

For I remembered that a good discordant human cry might strike terror even to the heart of a tiger. This, however, was no tiger.

My fresh onslaught caused the obstinate animal to bestir itself. It ran, or rather shambled along, skirting the house; then, instead of departing, it doubled back.

"Get me some stones, ayah, and come and help."

But not a sound or movement did she make in response.

I returned to the verandah a little out of breath. The woman stood exactly where I left her, holding the extinguished lamp in her rigid fingers. She was now ghastly with fear. I laid my hand on her naked arm and clasped it lightly above the elbow.

"Ayah! ayah!" I cried sharply. "Don't look like that! It's only a big pariah dog."

But my words made no impression; her gaze was fixed on something which she could see at the end of the verandah beyond the cots.

And now a most extraordinary thing happened. I have never been able to account for it satisfactorily. Either my imagination, being suddenly played upon, served me a curious trick, or contact with the ayah communicated to my brain the distorted vision which held her in such spellbound horror.

Following her gaze, I turned my eyes in the same direction, and met a most unaccountable, blood-curdling sight.

The creature which I had been so vainly endeavouring to frighten away was coming up the verandah steps—coming towards us with slow, deliberate mien. It shuffled along in half-human style, crawling rather than walking. It seemed stoutly built, with long, sinewy limbs. But its form of body was nothing compared with its hideous head. The face was ashy grey, and had a weird, human look, with a fiendish expression of malignity upon it. I could see its teeth and fiery eyes. Its mouth was extended in a grin of malice and its red tongue hung out, parched and dry.

With my hand still upon the arm of the ayah, I, too, gazed spellbound on the monstrosity. It seemed to see us, but showed no fear at our presence.

It approached the bed whereon lay my youngest child. I had thrown up the curtains, so that even the small protection of the mosquito net was gone. The little one was thus exposed to the night air and to the full view of the mysterious creature.

When it reached the bed it reared itself up on its hind legs and bent over the child with an evil grin of malice.

It was the action of a few seconds only. The ayah gave a piercing shriek, rivalling the owl, and dropped to my feet in a faint.

With one bound I flew towards the monster. It dropped upon its four legs and shambled away, disappearing in the direction of the tree, with a hoarse cry.

The extraordinary part of it was, that the moment I released my hold on the ayah's arm, the humanity of the creature faded, and it became thoroughly animal in its bearing. The malignity changed to a gaunt, starved expression, such as extreme hunger or thirst might have produced. The fiendish look in its eyes gave place to one of distress. After all, I must have been mistaken. It was only a jackal or a wanderoo monkey, hunting for a drop of water to quench its thirst, after its meal on the sacrificial offerings.

The ayah's cry, following on the screech of the night-jar, had roused the servants. They came hurrying up, and David was the first to detect her inanimate body, lying in a heap upon the floor. I had enough to do to sooth my startled children, who were both crying fretfully.

A little water restored her senses; she sat up and glanced round her fearfully. The sight of the butler reassured her; her tongue was loosened, and with voluble speech she described the scene in her own language.

Yes! she had seen the devil! Missus might say what she liked; it was the tree-devil—nothing but the tree-devil—and, oh! Amah! it had called her child, her darling sonnie! Hark at his crying! To-morrow would bring fever. One cock and one goat were not enough. It was such a bad, wicked devil. Hadn't she told the bandymen to kill *ten* fowls and *three* goats? Hadn't she promised to persuade missus that the jackal had taken all the fowls? They would not listen to her advice; they had only killed one fowl and one goat, and the devil was not satisfied. Now he would take her darling sonnie. Oh! Ayoh! Amah!—

"What time is it?" I cried loudly and sharply to the butler, who was listening with elongated face to the drivellings of the old woman. He glanced at the moon.

"About half-past three," he answered promptly.

"Tell the drivers to get ready to start. I cannot sleep again. Come, ayah! Stop all that noise. Come and dress the children. David, tell the cook to get the bread and milk ready; and you make me some tea. Now, look sharp!"

I poured a torrent of words on the terrified crew, knowing well

that nothing but an excess of bustle and work would dispel the horrors of the night.

No need to rouse the drivers. They were all awake, thanks to the early morning note of the devil-bird. Never before had the packing been done so promptly ; never before had so expeditious a start been made. There were no loiterers. Each man strove not to be last. Instead of heading the procession as usual, my cart was the last to move out of the yard. It was with unscrupulous goading and shouting that my driver urged his bullocks forward, not satisfied till he had placed the string of vehicles between himself and the dread tree, lest, true to the old proverb, the devil should take him as the hindmost.

Alas! poor sonnie developed fever and dysentery. The sea air did him no good. He had always been a delicate child. After some weeks of anxious nursing, his gentle soul returned to its Maker ; and, with many tears, I laid his faded little body in a quiet grave by that lonely Indian seashore. The doctor said that he had had the fever in him for some time previous and that nothing could have saved him.

The ayah, however, had other convictions, which were also held by the rest of my servants. To her dying day—Christian though she be by profession and faith—she will always believe that he was sacrificed to the malignity of the tree-devil.

Editor's Note.—Surely the creature seen must have been a large grey wanderoo monkey—a species common enough in South India.

As the Children see it.

I.

"WHAT do you think about it?" asked the boy in brown holland.

"Noffing," replied the child with the snub nose.

"It's Miss Simpson's wedding," explained the boy in brown holland. "Let's go and see it!"

The child with the snub nose nodded, and the two small creatures trotted off together, and passed down the village street, and into the churchyard, where the whole village, great and small, young and old, male and female, such of it as couldn't get into the church, was assembled, standing on tombstones, hot, red and hilarious, laughing, joking, scolding, stretching their necks, on tip-toe, and in immense excitement.

"Let's go round," said the boy in brown holland. "I know a place where we can see everything."

The two children slipped behind the crowd and made their way to a gnarled old tree, which grew leaning against a window in the north aisle of the church. Into this tree they climbed and looked into the church through a broken pane.

"Is vis a wedding?" inquired the child with the snub nose.

"It's only Miss Simpson's wedding," rejoined the boy in brown holland.

"Well, it's only Sunday very big," said the child with the snub nose, in an aggrieved tone.

"Hush!" said the boy in brown holland. "I heard cook say it was no end of a go."

Then soft music sounded, and the wedding guests in their pews at the top of the aisle fluttered and smoothed their dresses and nodded and bowed to each other and whispered and changed places and craned their necks towards the west door, and the motley village congregation, filling all the other pews, stood on the seats and swayed backwards and forwards and giggled and pointed and ejaculated below their breaths, and slapped their babies and then hushed them.

"If vis was Sunday, Mr. Simpson 'd turn 'em all out," observed the child with the snub nose.

"But it isn't Sunday—it's only Miss Simpson's wedding," said the boy in brown holland.

Then the bride entered, and the bridegroom started out of a corner where he had been lurking, and the service proceeded; and those two took their life-long vow in low tones and out of full hearts, for was it not for better, for worse, till death them should part?

"Let's get down," said the child with the snub nose, in a tone of contempt. "It's not no end of a go at all. Let's go and play at being Red Indians!"

Then they descended from their perch and went back the way they came.

"So vat's a wedding!" remarked the child with the snub nose. "I'd much raver have a baby and choose its name myself. We knew vey were called Edward and Margaret."

"You see, grown-ups have so few pleasures," said the boy in brown holland, with infinite pity.

II.

"How disgusting!" exclaimed Miss Beauclerc.

"What is it?" asked the artist, looking over her shoulder through the window of the inn parlour.

Outside, in the village street, were two very small girls, squatting on either side of a considerable puddle, into which they by turns gravely dipped an old comb and proceeded to comb their unkempt locks with the dripping instrument.

"Little pigs!" ejaculated Miss Beauclerc.

The artist flung open the window and vaulted out into the road, startling the small girls by his abrupt appearance.

"Here, you monkeys, drop that!" he cried, good humouredly. "What will your mother say when you go home like two little sweeps? Here, give it me! You mustn't do that, you know. Here goes!"

He pitched the comb over the stable-yard wall as he spoke, and then delicately rubbed the mud off the points of his fingers on his cambric pocket-handkerchief.

"Now, don't ever do it again," he went on. "Here's a three-penny-bit for each of you. Now toddle off and get washed!"

He dropped two small coins into the filthy little hands and then vaulted back into the inn parlour, laughing.

"Poor little wretches!" he said. "They hadn't a word to say for themselves."

"Little *pigs*!" said Miss Beauclerc again.

The little pigs tottered away together, grasping each other's hands, but not speaking. Truth to tell, they were too terrified to remonstrate, to complain, to reply, even to address each other. Gentlemen were invariably terrors to them, chiefly because the old vicar, who sometimes spoke to them, had a large white hairless face, and because his son, the major, who had never spoken to them in their lives, had a small red face, with an enormous drooping moustache. But when they had got out of sight and earshot of the inn, they stood still, and with one accord opened their mouths wide and screamed. This howl, which was prolonged and dolorous, brought a little young woman, aged seven, out of a neighbouring cottage.

"What are you hollerin' for?" she cried, vigorously slapping both the small girls several times. "Be quiet, do! Great girls like you—I'm ashamed of you! Hold your row, I say!" And she slapped again.

The small girls made no resistance. They looked at the little young woman, stood still while she chastized them, gave one farewell bellow of great length and exceeding agony, and then shut their mouths and stumbled off, their eyes swollen, their cheeks tear-stained, their whole tiny personages quivering. They couldn't speak; they couldn't explain their grief, or state their case, or even communicate verbally with each other. They were simply heart-broken. What were threepenny-bits, which their mammy would take away, to them? Their cherished plaything—their one dear possession—their beloved old comb, had been violently wrested from them, and the light had gone out of their eyes for ever. Life was no longer worth living; henceforth it was a wilderness—a vale of tears—a flagon spilt. They had left home two very small girls; they returned to it two little young women, aged five and six. Childhood was gone: an old comb had been thrown over the wall!

A week later, Miss Beauclerc, strolling through the lanes, came upon two solemn, anxious-faced little young women, one pushing a perambulator that held twins of two years old, and the other

lugging an infant in her arms, while a boy of three clung to her pinafore. Miss Beauclerc did not recognize the little pigs.

"You poor little mites!" she cried. "Why, the babies are as big as you are yourselves! Why do you do it? Why don't you play?"

The little young women looked at her steadfastly.

"We'd a ole comb onst," said the little young woman of six, after a pause. "An' the gempleman at th' Griffin prigged it an' throwed it away."

"But he gave you sixpence instead," said Miss Beauclerc, recalling the incident and blushing underneath her gauze veil.

"Mammy bagged the tin," said the little young woman of six. "An' there warn't nothink else an' we tooked up wi' th' little uns."

III.

IT was a hot July afternoon, and the sun streamed into the schoolroom, and Ella's little plump hands were quite sticky and her pink cotton frock was crumpled, and she felt tormented and utterly incompetent to do her sums.

"Seven times six is forty-one—seven times six is forty-one," she kept on repeating in a low tone.

"Seven times six *are*," corrected Miss Brown, who sat by her side, so fresh and dainty in her tussore dress, with her white cool fingers running over her embroidery. *She* never wanted to touch her neat coils of hair with her hot, inky hands—indeed, her hands never were either hot or inky—and she never wanted to kick her toes against the legs of the table, or to drum her feet upon the floor, or to loll her neck upon the back of her chair, or to shrug one shoulder to the level of her ear, or to twist both her legs round the legs of her chair so that it was almost impossible to decide which knee belonged to which ankle, or to stretch and yawn, or to lay her face on the slate to cool it, or to suck her pencil, or to tie her pocket-handkerchief round her wrist, or indeed to do any of those nice, comfortable and consoling things which Ella was doing all day long, and for which also she was being reprov'd all day long.

"Seven times six *are*," said Miss Brown again. "And don't put your pencil in your mouth, my dear."

Ella removed her pencil, and she sighed so desperately that she

created a little whirlwind, and blew Miss Brown's crewels off the table.

"You shouldn't puff like that, Ella," remarked Miss Brown.

"I must breathe," said Ella, indignantly.

"Yes, but not in that loud rude way," said Miss Brown.

"I can't help it," said Ella.

"I am sorry you think that, because it will make it more difficult for you to learn to help it, and that is what you must learn," said Miss Brown, composedly.

Then Ella let both her hands fall helplessly down, and she hung her head on one side and shut her eyes and groaned.

"Sit up, Ella—sit up, and don't make such fearful noises," said Miss Brown. "Come, suppose we stop the arithmetic for this afternoon, and you shall write an essay instead. Seven times six are forty-two, recollect. But just for the moment turn your slate over and write me an essay."

"What about?" asked Ella, popping her pencil into her mouth.

"Don't suck your pencil, Ella. About?—well, about anything you like," said Miss Brown, removing herself and her needle-work to an easy-chair by the window.

Underneath her well-fitting bodice Miss Brown's heart was beating almost to suffocation, and while her fingers seemed so engrossed with her little shining needle, and while her feet lay so still side by side on the floor, she was inwardly in such a whirl that it was almost a wonder that she didn't box Ella's ears and send her flying from the room in tears and disgrace, and it was certainly a wonder that she remembered to correct the little girl for all her awkward tricks. But this she did from a keen sense of duty, and because she possessed a very fine conscience, which would not allow her to cheat her employer by neglecting Ella's manners for a single moment or even losing her temper once. All the time, however, she was thinking that at that very moment her naval cousin Tom was arriving at the Waterloo terminus, and hailing a hansom and directing the cabby to drive him to a certain little house in St. John's Wood, where Miss Brown lived with her mother. Miss Brown's heart thumped hard at the thought. For what had not Cousin Tom's letter (which was in Miss Brown's pocket and which she now drew forth and re read)—what did not Cousin Tom's letter mean? What could it mean but that Cousin Tom meant ardently to implore Miss Brown to promise

to become his wife, even though a long engagement and frequent separations were inevitable? So Miss Brown's heart leapt; but it sank too, several times, as she thought how many years must elapse before she and Tom could be wed, because a naval officer's pay is not enough for two, and a governess's pay is not enough for one, and—well, notwithstanding her happy anticipations and her excitement, it was rather a weary world, Miss Brown reflected, when one always had to worry oneself to make a tiresome little girl well-behaved, and could hardly ever do what one liked—not even be at home to welcome one's lover when he arrived after a three years' absence!

Meanwhile, Ella slouched over the table, with her left eye close to her slate, and with all her fingers bunched up at the very tip of her pencil, and the end of the pencil pointing in any direction but towards Ella's right shoulder. But Ella wrote fast. Composition was much more in her line than sums, especially when she was allowed to choose her own theme. Once or twice, however, Miss Brown turned her head and admonished her.

"Sit up, Ella—sit up!" she said, several times. "And, my dear child, cannot you hold your pencil properly? Don't put out the tip of your tongue, please. And where is your right leg, Ella?"

Ella was sitting upon her right leg, while her left leg was stretched out quite an uncommonly long way behind her. So Miss Brown got up and came across the room and put Ella's unwilling little body straight with her cool steady hands.

"Now finish, my dear," she said; "for it is a quarter to five, and at five I must go."

So Ella finished her essay and brought her slate to Miss Brown, and Miss Brown read the effusion and laughed secretly, and sighed a little also. For this was what Ella had written:

ON GOVERNESSES.

GOVERNESSES are very happy people. They sit and make other people mind, and you have to mind when she tells you. It's a horrid bore for me, but it must be dreadfully nice for them, cos they can do anything they like, and it's like being the pope, and I've always thought the pope must be awfully happy, cos he has only got to say a thing is write and it is write. Governesses can do anything they like, which my father says the house of commons can't do, as they have to debate on settled things and they

always have to quarrel about Ireland first, though some of them are quite sick of it. But I believe if they had Governesses there, they'd settle it and keep every one in order. Governesses are always keeping us in order and they like it more than anything. She doesn't want anything else but to tell people about their tongues and their legs, and what they like best is to say don't. When I am grown up I mean to be a Governess. It must be much nicer to say don't than have it said. I shan't ever marry any one, cos it would be horrid to have a little girl and another Governess keep her in order and say don't. I wonder mothers don't rebel, but I suppose mothers and Governesses are castes, like the hindus, and praps I can't ever be a Governess, which is very disappointing. Well, this is all, cos she says I'm to stop. There's nothing Governesses can't do and they are the most powerful caste in England.

"There is no such word as *cos*, Ella—the word is *because*—will you try and remember?" said Miss Brown. "There are a great many errors, both of grammar and spelling, in your essay, my dear, but I haven't time to point them out to-day. Good-bye, dear child!"

Then Ella's limpness suddenly vanished, and she flew to open the hall-door, and stood outside for several minutes watching Miss Brown as she went briskly down the street. And Miss Brown put up her parasol and went away, without once looking back to say, "Don't stand at the front-door, Ella, and don't stand on one foot!"

"There's *nothing* she can't do," thought Ella, catching her left foot in her hand and holding it tight. "She even needn't say 'don't,' if she doesn't choose!"

FAYR MADOC.

Mrs. Meredith's Ball.

"JACK, dear, *do* let me give one, only a little one; we have been going out so much, that we really ought to do something in return; and this room is such a good shape, with a polished floor all ready; and it needn't cost more than just the wine, with Babette to do the supper; and you know how cheap flowers are, Jack—*please!*"

"Quite out of the question, my dear," responded a manly voice to this impassioned appeal; "you know we couldn't do it properly under fifty pounds at the least, and I can't afford it."

"Oh, but Jack—!" and pretty little Mrs. Meredith rose from her chair, dropping her work basket and all its contents regardlessly on the floor, and stepping through the open French window into the verandah to kneel down beside her husband's lounging chair and repeat all the little feminine blandishments she was mistress of. Never had she known them to fail; for was she not the acknowledged belle of the English circle at Biarritz, celebrated alike for her beauty, wit, and a sort of audacious daring, which was constantly on the point of getting her into serious scrapes, which she as constantly escaped with no worse consequences than the disapproval of the more straitlaced of her acquaintances, who shook their heads sadly over "*that* little Mrs. Meredith's goings on," though they dared not express more open censure of such an universal favourite. However, for once Jack was obdurate; and at last, with a pout of some real disappointment and vexation, his wife left him and sat down to her crewel work again, feeling as nearly out of temper as she ever was, and showing it by maintaining a marked and dignified silence for fully ten minutes.

At last her husband, becoming aware of something unusual, glanced up from *The Nineteenth Century*, which he was perusing, with a somewhat languid interest, between the whiffs of a remarkably good Regalia. He saw such an unmistakable frown on

that lovely little face that he got up, laid his cigar gingerly on one side, placed a paper knife between the leaves of his book, went over to his wife, took her face between his hands, and, regardless of her indignation, kissed her affectionately, saying :

"I am so sorry, dear, you should be so disappointed ; and if I wasn't so hard up you should do it directly—but unless——" What he was going to say must remain unrecorded, for at this instant the door was suddenly opened and a little maid in the freshest and stiffest of white caps announced, "Madame and de Mees Barton."

Much ashamed of being caught in so loverlike an attitude, Jack vanished out of the window, while Ethel, hastily endeavouring to smooth her hair, which had been somewhat discomposed, rose with an attempt to receive the unwelcome visitors in a staid and matronly manner.

Happily for her, Mrs. Barton was far too full of her errand to notice it ; and her daughter, a tall, robust, rather gushing young woman, was too short-sighted to see anything without the aid of her *pince-nez*.

Ethel Meredith sighed as she resigned herself to a *mauvais quart d'heure*, for worthy Mrs. Barton was an advanced type of that most terrible of all social bores, a "charitable worker." Never was there a needy curate with a wife and sixteen children to support on £150 per annum, never was there a church that wanted restoring, a school that wanted building, or any kind of necessity for funds, but there was Mrs. Barton in the breach. Clergymen found her an invaluable assistant, for she was to be deterred by no rebuffs, and indeed was so well known that the unhappy victim would willingly give almost anything to rid himself of her importunities. Excellent woman though she was, she had done more to cast a stigma on the noble name of charity than any of its avowed opponents.

On this occasion, however, Mrs. Meredith thought herself lucky in being let off for half-a-crown for a raffle for some object of which she had rather a vague notion after her visitors had left ; for Mrs. Barton's rapid flow of talk, occasionally interrupted by an enthusiastic exclamation from her daughter, was calculated rather to confuse than to enlighten her hearers.

However, at last they went, and with a devout ejaculation of thankfulness Ethel ran upstairs to refresh her mind with a

talk to her sister Amy, who was then staying with them, and who on the pretext of a slight headache had retired to her room and had not been visible for some hours. Softly Ethel opened her door, to find the supposed invalid reclining on a sofa near the open window, which looked over a broad expanse of blue summer sea and a bluer sky. She was dividing her attention between Rhoda Broughton's latest novel and a box of chocolate bonbons, which last she hastily tried to cover with a fold of her tea-gown when her sister entered.

"Ah!" said Ethel, and that short word held a volume of meaning. "This is the way we cure our headaches, is it!" Then daintily abstracting a chocolate with her small thumb and finger, she observed:

"From Fred, of course, you lucky girl; Jack never gave me any when we were engaged." Then catching sight of a bulky envelope, feloniously laid face downwards on the writing-table, she remarked in a tone of grave reproof, "Now, my dear child, how many times have I tried to impress upon you that honesty is the best policy; now why on earth could you not have said truthfully that you were coming upstairs to write six sheets to Fred, and eat a whole box of chocolates, instead of shamming a headache, and being detected in falsehood, thereby shaking my faith in your truthfulness, and destroying one of my most cherished illusions."

During this harangue, Amy had risen from her couch and moved over to the looking-glass, where she proceeded to arrange her soft brown hair, which she had let down. As soon as Ethel paused for breath, she remarked in a deprecatory tone, "I really would have told the truth if only Jack hadn't been there; but he *does* tease so, and I have only written two sheets; and you can see yourself the box is nearly full—so there!"

She is a pretty girl, and Ethel regards her with affectionate admiration as she stands there emphasizing her words with the hair brush. Tall and slight, with a perfectly oval face, straight features and remarkably sweet expression, she looks older than her *petite* sister, though Ethel is really two years her senior, and has besides been married for more than that time. Amy's face has so placid and serene an expression when in repose, that she has been likened to one of Raphael's Madonnas; but she has a keen sense of humour, and when her grey eyes lighten up and

sparkle, her whole face assumes an expression of arch merriment wholly incompatible with such a likeness.

She proceeds leisurely to plait up her hair, observing at the same time, "I saw those dreadful Bartons coming in, so I thought it would be a pity to disturb you. What was it for, this time?"

"A raffle for something or other, I don't know what; but only three francs, so I thought myself in luck."

"What a woman she is; she would do *anything* to get money," said Amy, with sympathy.

"Well, I can understand that," rejoined Ethel rather ruefully. "Isn't it a shame? Jack won't let me give a dance, because he declares he can't afford it! Such nonsense, when he paid Clémentine's bill only last week with hardly a murmur. He is a good old soul, after all—sometimes."

"Perhaps it was *because* he had paid her bill!" suggests Amy—but so brutally sensible an argument does not at all suit Mrs. Meredith's ideas, and she changes the subject abruptly.

A few minutes afterwards, Jack's cheery voice is heard: "*Ethel*, A-a-my, come down to tea!" which interruption is seemingly to the taste of both ladies, as they hastily descend to partake of that most sociable of all meals.

Some visitors, mostly of the male sex, drop in; and Jack presently goes out on his usual stroll down to the post-office, from which he does not return till the dressing-bell rings. Ethel's head is still full of the ball; and a casual remark, made by one of her visitors, a beardless youth, who observed artlessly, "What a jolly polka we could have in this room; you weally ought to give us a chance, Mrs. Mewedith," had renewed her desires; but almost as he speaks there flashes into her mind an Idea of such magnitude that she is almost stunned by it.

Shortly after, her guest took his departure, marvelling greatly at his hostess's absence of mind and irrelevant answers to his harmless prattle, and Ethel threw herself on to a sofa to try and think it out seriously. The more she thought, the more feasible did it seem; and it was with an overpowering sense of her own intellectual capacity that she went upstairs to change her dress; but as she entered her room all such thoughts were scattered by her husband's grave face, as he came towards her with an open letter in his hand.

"I say! do look here," he exclaimed, "was ever anything so provoking? James has written to say that I must come home at once; there is some tiresome legal difficulty about Uncle Ralph's will, and I am the only surviving witness."

James, or Sir James Meredith, is Jack's elder brother, who lives a somewhat morose and solitary life on his large estate in Somersetshire. He has but lately succeeded his uncle, Sir Ralph, whose will is the one in question. In the old days when "Jim" and "Jack" Meredith had been the firmest of friends, little Ethel Ferrars had come across their path; and it was a nine-days' wonder why she should have refused the elder, with his handsome face and brilliant prospects, only to take up with his younger brother, who had absolutely nothing of the sort to recommend him. Ah well! a woman's heart will for ever remain a mystery; and if she *had* accepted Jack, solely out of sincere love for himself and not for his position, that was the last explanation the world would have thought of. At any rate, they are a very happy couple; and if Ethel feels occasionally a twinge of remorse at the thought of her brother-in-law wasting his life in morbid solitude, it only made her the more anxious to cheer it as much as possible, and as far as in her lay to make up for the blight she had, perhaps not quite unknowingly, cast upon his career.

Therefore she was generally willing for her husband to go as much as possible to the Towers; for at first, in his bitter wrath and jealousy, Sir James had declared he would never see his brother again; and only by dint of the gentlest tact had Mrs. Meredith been enabled to heal the breach, until at last Jack became a constant and welcome guest at his brother's house. Just now, however, Jack's face is clouded with irritation as he stamps about, throwing his things into the portmanteau, for he must go by a train that very night, or he cannot be in time to meet the lawyers.

His wife soothes him as much as possible, and straightens the things in the portmanteau, wisely desisting from any mention of her own private grievance until all is packed and ready; and as she deftly tucks a neat packet of his favourite sandwiches into a pocket of his travelling coat and fills up his flask, he gives her a hearty kiss, and says, "Thanks, awfully, dear; I'll write directly I get there, and I hope I shan't be kept over a week;" and she watches him away with something like a lump in her throat,

for though she *is* such an old married woman, she is very fond of her husband still. Then she returns to a *tête-à-tête* evening with her sister, and they are very merry, while the Idea once more comes to the front and assumes gigantic proportions.

Mrs. Meredith is a little woman of a decided disposition. The next morning she orders round the little low basket carriage that she usually patronizes, and sets off, to Amy's surprise, all alone, on a round of calls.

She returns triumphant about two o'clock, and to Amy's inquiries responded that she had found everybody at home, and had had a delightful morning. This is so unlike her usual conduct, for she abhorred calling as a rule, that Amy's curiosity was much excited, the more so that Ethel declined giving her any information whatever as to the reason for this unparalleled performance.

At last, as Ethel rises from the table where she has been partaking of a hearty *déjeuner*, she drops her card case, and both sisters pounce upon it. Amy is the first, and taking a mean advantage of her height, holds it well out of Ethel's reach, saying merrily, "Now I *know* you're up to some mischief—I can't imagine what, but as you seem to be anxious to get this back, I shall just keep it until you tell me, or else open it."

Ethel made a spring, but missed it; and after a hot and most undignified struggle was obliged to sink panting into a chair, saying, breathlessly, "You wretch, how dare you behave so to your elder sister? I wish I were taller;" while Amy carefully opens the dainty little case and draws out a list written in Ethel's large well-formed writing, which she proceeds to read aloud:

"Mrs. Brown, 5 francs; E. Brown, Esq., 5 francs; The Misses Moss, 10 francs; Captain Clark, 10 francs; General Whittington, 5 francs; &c.' My *dear* Ethel! what *does* this mean?"

Mrs. Meredith had watched her opportunity, and now wrested the paper from her sister's hand and fled with it, leaving Amy completely puzzled. She was well accustomed to her freaks, however; and at last, wisely giving up any attempt to find out any more, went into the pleasant *salon* and sat down to the writing-table.

As she opened the blotting book, two or three slips of paper

were visible, where careless Ethel had left them, and Amy read, worded in two or three different ways, but always headed the same, "An Appeal to the Benevolent," a heartrending account of a poor woman whose husband having deserted her was on the point of starvation, being unable to support herself owing to rheumatism in the hands. A little money was urgently needed to support her and her family till her hands were well enough to do plain needlework.

Amy read this with some surprise, for though she knew her sister's generous disposition, she wondered at her keeping it such a secret, and above all at taking it upon herself to collect the necessary funds.

Presently Ethel re-entered the room, looking as innocent as a baby, in a cool white gown with pale blue bows, and rang the bell sharply. The little maid entered, and was despatched to the stationer's for some envelopes and cards, and Mrs. Meredith sat down to the *escritoire* and began apparently to do arithmetic, judging from the little impatient sounds Amy heard of "Five and five's ten, and five's fifteen, and fifteen—Amy, what's twice fifteen? oh, of course!" and so on.

Amy, however, had determined to be offended at being kept out of the secret; so read "Belinda" steadily, taking no notice, until Ethel abruptly turned round upon her sister with:

"By the way, I suppose you are going to the Stopfords this afternoon? I met Mrs. Barton this morning, and she will be delighted to chaperone you."

Amy raised her eyes for an instant, and remarked indifferently:

"I haven't the least intention of going, thanks all the same."

Ethel frowned and bit her lip, but knowing of old it was impossible to coerce her sister, remarked amiably, after a pause:

"I should be so much obliged if you would just step down to the library and change a book for me; I haven't anything to read."

By this time Amy had become aware that her sister was anxious to get rid of her, which of course decided her to stay at all hazards; and apparently Ethel thought so too, for when Louise entered with the packets of envelopes she said, in a suspiciously bland manner:

"I wonder if you would like to help me with these tiresome addresses, dear?"

Amy rose with alacrity, thinking herself about to be enlightened; but after ten minutes' steady copying of names from Mrs. Meredith's little "Where is it?" she laid down her pen and insisted upon being at once told what they were for.

Ethel put her finger on her lips and whispered, as if the walls could hear, with her blue eyes dancing with fun:

"Why, you little goose, can't you guess? I'm going to give a *Ball!*"

"Ethel!" exclaimed her sister, "you don't say so! Why, didn't Jack say he wouldn't?"

"Of course he did," responded Ethel in high glee, "but I've arranged all that;" and observing Amy's lips about to open again she popped a gigantic caramel therein, which effectually stopped any remarks, and observed conclusively, "Now, all you've got to do is just to help me finish these off, and not ask a single question, or I won't ask Fred to come to it!"

Amy succumbed, having entirely forgotten all about her little fit of *pique*, and also about her sister's new *protégée*.

They worked away steadily for some time, till at last all the envelopes were addressed, and Ethel began to fill them with the cards, which Amy was surprised to see were dated that day week.

"What will you do if Jack isn't back?" she inquired.

But Ethel only laughed and said that would be all right, and they fell to discussing the capabilities of the rooms and the number of musicians required.

The next morning the breakfast table was crowded with answers, and Amy was so happy over her own private letter, which was from Fred Travers, to say that as his Queen and country did not seem to have any desperate need of his labours, he would start a week earlier than he had intended to join them, and would arrive on the following day. He was a hard-working young Foreign Office clerk! At least so he represented himself; but it was singular that whenever he wanted a holiday there seemed to be no particular objection to his taking one.

Ethel was delighted to hear of this arrangement, for, as she said, "It will be such a comfort to have a man to help one, and

Fred's absurd height will really come in useful to hang up the decorations."

Amy retorted, with some heat, that Ethel thought everybody's height absurd who was more than five foot nothing, and for her part she admired tall men; but this small digression was soon forgotten in the all-absorbing topic.

As the days went on, Ethel received a number of little notes with inclosures, which, however, she never allowed Amy to open; and several times when she attempted to find out something more about the mysterious poor woman, Ethel either changed the subject or promised to tell her about it presently; and as it never seemed to come to "presently," Amy gradually forgot all about it and gave up her whole mind to the preparations, which were to be somewhat on a large scale. Once she ventured to remonstrate with her sister, and asked if she was quite sure Jack wouldn't mind her spending so much; but was quite reassured by Ethel's gay little laugh; and as she had a vague idea that her brother-in-law had been called away about some money matters, she assumed that an unexpected accession of wealth had fallen in, and troubled no more about it. At last all the preparations were made. The pretty rooms were cleared out and the shining parquet floors received an extra polish.

A wealth of flowers was lavishly distributed about them; and about six o'clock Ethel Meredith threw herself into an easy chair in the only room left in its pristine state—for the convenience of sitters out—with a deep sigh of relief, and declared herself too languid to take the trouble of pouring out tea, which duty therefore devolved upon Fred, who had followed her in, in a state of dust and shirt-sleeves. Ethel, lying back with her eyes closed, was not aware of this daring innovation till Amy, entering with an English letter for her sister, uttered a little shriek of dismay, and ordered her *fiancé* to at once retire and make himself fit for society; the amiable altercation ensuing therefrom preventing them both from observing the deep flush which had overspread Mrs. Meredith's fair face while with shaky fingers she broke the letter open.

Amy, still engaged with remedying the masculine mistakes among the tea-things, did not look up as she inquired:

"Well, what news from Jack; I suppose he will be here soon?"

Ethel was sufficiently composed by this time to answer in a tone of would-be disappointment, but in which a keen observer might have detected a shade of relief:

"No, indeed; he cannot possibly leave until to-morrow."

"Oh, dear! what a pity!" cried Amy; "how disappointed he will be."

"Well, I don't know," said Ethel. "You know he hates being upset; and I daresay he will enjoy all our talk about it afterwards all the more for not having been turned out of his smoking-room, and having nowhere to go for a couple of days; and he really is getting rather too stout for dancing!"

At this moment Fred entered in a clean white suit, and hearing the end of the sentence only, feigned such misery and anguish of mind, entirely declining any sugar in his tea, or bread-and-butter, that his future sister-in-law punished him by giving him neither, for his conceit in always thinking himself the one object of everybody's thoughts.

"What time do you expect everybody?" he inquired presently. "Do you think it would astonish the natives too much if I appeared in this costume? It would be so awfully comfortable and cool."

This remark not being considered worthy of notice, he subsided for a short time; and catching sight of Jack's letter, lying open on the floor, stretched out a long arm and possessed himself of it, Ethel not noticing his movements till he exclaimed:

"Hullo! old Jack not coming back. I say, you know, you might have given a fellow notice. How do you suppose I am going to get myself up to represent him and play the host, all in a moment?"

"Fred," exclaimed Ethel, "how dare you read my letters? Give it up at once!"

He looked up, amazed at her sharp tone, and observing she was really annoyed, handed it over to her, observing:

"I'm awfully sorry, but I thought you saw me take it."

"Of course I didn't," she replied, putting it safely away in her pocket and, to Fred and Amy's great surprise, leaving the room in a haughty manner immediately.

"I say, she must be done up. I never knew her cross before," observed Fred. "Now I wonder why on earth she should have minded. It was the merest scrap, just to say,

'Meet me by the 12.40 to-morrow. I have got off a day sooner after all.'

"No mention of the ball?" said Amy. "How funny; but Jack is the worst correspondent in the world."

Mrs. Meredith's entrance here stopped the conversation, and they soon separated to dress.

There is no necessity to describe the ball—everybody can imagine for themselves the details. Suffice it to say that it was a great success, and pretty Mrs. Meredith never looked prettier. She made the most charming hostess, and was ably seconded by her sister and Fred Travers, who danced valiantly with all the plain girls, took care of the dowagers, and only glared at Amy's numerous partners, without proceeding to extremities with them.

Towards the end of the evening, Ethel drew him aside, and whispered, "Fred, I want you to do something for me!"

"Anything in my poor power, most gracious dame," was his reply.

"Very well; then you must know that I have been getting up a *raffle* lately; never mind what for," she added hastily, observing his astonishment, "but all these good people have taken tickets, and I promised that the numbers should be drawn after supper to-night; so I want you to come in with me and do all the necessary talking."

"What a rum thing for you to take up, Ethel; and what was the object raffled?"

Ethel went off into a fit of laughter; and answering, "Just come here and I'll show you!" led the way through a back passage into a sort of larder, where, to Fred's amazement, he saw a little hamper half full of straw, which, on being opened, discovered a small pig, fantastically decorated with bows of blue ribbon! Carefully shutting the door, Ethel led him back to the lighted ball-room, where her short absence had not been noticed, and directed him to take in the fattest old dowager to supper. Very soon everybody had taken the hint, and were pairing off for the same purpose. Ethel had had a large tent erected in the garden to accommodate them all; and when everybody was seated Fred rose to his feet and announced that the drawing of lots would now begin. Everybody drew a folded slip of paper, but everybody drew blanks, until Ethel, who had laid hers

carelessly aside, opened it. She gave a little shriek, for on her paper was that mystic word denoting the prize was hers.

The pig was borne majestically in, and presented to her amid roars of applause; but she looked more puzzled and unhappy than pleased; and when some one suggested that she should now make known the total sum which had been collected, and the name of the happy recipient, she turned rather pale, hurriedly whispered to Fred that he must make an excuse for her, and left the tent. Fred, never at a loss, at once rose, and bowing gracefully, explained that Mrs. Meredith was not certain of the exact sum, but would let them all know it on the following day, with all other particulars. Then the fun began again, fast and furious; and presently Mrs. Meredith was dancing away as cheerily as possible, and it was not until the small hours that the last of her guests drove away.

"Mrs. Meredith's Ball" was always quoted after that as the very model and pattern to all like entertainments.

Though they had all been up so late, Ethel was down quite early on the following day, and astonished her yawning servants by a sort of feverish anxiety to get things straight again, even assisting herself, as far as possible, till at last the rooms began to assume their normal condition; and when Jack arrived, travel-worn and dusty after his long journey, he saw no evidences of anything unusual, except, indeed, the general sleepiness of all the household, and went straight up to his room to take a tub and a cup of coffee.

Presently he heard a knock at his door, and his wife's voice, "Jack, may I come in?"

He unlocked the door and Ethel entered, looking very shame-faced, and yet with an arch sparkle of merriment in her eyes.

For nearly an hour Fred and Amy saw nothing of them, and then went out for a stroll, not returning till nearly tea-time, when they came in together at the French window to find Jack alone with his beloved cigarette.

He rose as they entered and exclaimed, "At last! I thought you had gone for good! Now, Travers, can you tell me, upon your honour, that you knew nothing of all this?" Fred and Amy exchanged glances, as they had already confidences.

"No, indeed," said Fred; "we *knew* nothing about anything, but we have our suspicions!" Evidently Jack had been endeavouring to keep a grave and dignified position of reproof; but now he hastily turned his back, and they could see his shoulders shaking.

After a pause, he resumed in a quavering voice: "Never attempt to cross your wife, Fred; she comes of a deceitful and a determined family. This freak of Ethel's will cost me fifty pounds."

"Why?" exclaimed Amy. "Surely you won't return the money?"

"Of course I must," grimly said Jack; "and what's more, Ethel is writing notes of apology to every one who took tickets in the sham raffle."

"Oh, poor Ethel!" said Amy; "I must go and help her."

"No," firmly exclaimed Jack. "Alone she thought out her nefarious plan, and alone she must expiate her sins."

Next week Mr. and Mrs. Meredith had left Biarritz.

A. W. F.

"Chateaur en Espagne."

By MRS. E. M. DAVY.

BOURET was a millionaire in the time of Louis XV.

History records not by what means his fortune had been made, simply that it was achieved, and that the king desired to borrow on behalf of his empty coffers.

When applied to, Bouret was *difficile* and audacious, and objected to make the loan to oblige the court, though he expressed himself willing enough to furnish the money on one condition—he must be presented to the king.

Now it was contrary to etiquette that his Majesty's name should be made use of in transactions of this nature; the wish, however, of the ambitious lender was communicated to the governor of the palace, and by him to the prime minister, much mockery and laughter being the result.

But money was an absolute necessity, so the prime minister, taking the king in a moment of good humour, attempted to solve the difficulty.

Louis XV. at first flatly refused the conditions, on the grounds that it would be establishing a bad precedent, but at length yielded his consent with certain reservations: Bouret must not be announced, nor his name entered in the *livre des réceptions*; only, some day, while walking in the grounds of Marly, the king would permit the money-lender to accost and offer him homage.

The coveted millions were not long in being quietly transmitted to the king, and the latter had now to perform his part of the contract.

It would be amusing to imagine the feelings of Bouret when he was conducted to Marly and stationed in the particular walk along which the king would pass.

It is recorded that when he saw Louis XV. slowly approaching, leaning on his gold-headed cane, Bouret lost alike his enthusiasm and his ingenious projects for sustaining the much-longed-for conversation. His limbs trembled; the effect on his mind was

such a medley of respect and terror that had it not been too late he would have turned and fled.

The king was within twenty steps of him. Bouret pulled himself together at random, and, hat in hand, bowed profoundly.

The king, in matters of courtesies no unworthy successor to Louis XIV., pausing in front of Bouret, raised his hat, and in his soft voice said pleasantly :

"Monsieur Bouret, je me promets le plaisir d'aller manger une pêche à votre campagne, puisque vous m'avez rendu visite à Marly."

The royal speaker was far enough off before Bouret, intoxicated with pride and happiness, could find a suitable reply.

The King of France and Navarre had promised to eat a peach at Bouret's *campagne* ! What could be more gracious on the part of a monarch ? This simple millionaire was not conscious that Mme. de Sévigné had expressed similar sentiments when Louis XIV. had danced with her.

On returning to Paris, which scarcely seemed large enough to hold him, Bouret told every one of his happiness. Then it occurred to him for the first time that he had no *campagne*. He would purchase an estate at once ; there should be a château on it, and both must be worthy of the royal guest.

He sought the country for miles round Paris, but there was not a château to buy or rent.

One day, wearied with his search, he rested near the small village of Nandy. Behind him extended the forest of Rougeaux ; at his feet flowed the Seine ; the surrounding scenery was superb.

"Puisque personne ne veut me vendre un château," he cried ; "j'en élèverai un ici, dont je rendrai tous les autres jaloux."

A few days later Bouret purchased the estate of Croix-Fontaine, and immediately began to erect his "Château en Espagne."

It was built in the form of a pavilion. Besides the *salons* usual to all castles, the Château Bouret contained apartments of incredible originality. That called *du Japon* alone cost several millions to decorate. It was literally of porcelain. The tables, couches, chimney-piece, cornices, all came from China. The staircase leading to this apartment was also of porcelain, tinted gold and azure, and curved like a sea-shell, of which it had the

roseate transparency. The description of the whole reads like an extract from the "Arabian Nights."

The architects, masons, painters, gardeners, at length retired ; the château and grounds were completed, and the peaches were not forgotten.

Bouret's most ardent wish now was to recall to his sovereign the promise made a year before ; and during that year the debt, instead of being repaid, had considerably increased.

It was less difficult for the money-lender to obtain the second audience. This time he was permitted to show himself at Versailles, in a royal *salon*, in the midst of the Condés, the Malignons, and the Villerois.

"Sire," said Bouret humbly, "the peach is ripe, my château awaits the visit promised—if your Majesty will deign to remember—in your park of Marly."

Without remembering the necessity for the word "peach" in the phrase of Bouret, Louis understood that the financier wished to recall to his mind that he had proposed such a visit.

"Très bien, Monsieur Bouret," said he ; "nous irons bientôt chasser dans votre parc." And his Majesty passed on.

Bouret was overwhelmed. This was a greater honour still ! And already in imagination he saw himself on horse-back beside the king, and heard the blowing of horns and baying of hounds. It would be a matter of history, this visit of the King of France to the Château Bouret, and immediately he spent 100,000 écus in providing stags, boars, and all the equipments for the chase. Also, he had a colossal statue of the king erected in the courtyard, for which he asked Voltaire to compose the inscription.

The philosopher of Ferney hated the king, whom he also feared, and he wrote a long and satirical letter in reply, containing several rhymed and prose inscriptions, but concluded thus :

"Le résultat de tout ceci, monsieur, est que vous n'aurez point de vers de moi pour votre statue."

Louis XV. was already old when he so rashly undertook to eat peaches in the gardens of the financier, and he was five years older when, for the third time, Bouret presented himself—on this occasion at the Tuileries—and respectfully reminded him of the flattering hope his Majesty had given that he would hunt in his park.

Louis remembered this promise perfectly.

With infinite tact and his usual courteous manner he remarked to Bouret that he was rather old for *la chasse*. He assured him, however, that he was ready to ratify his words in spite of age and need of repose, if pressed to do so.

Overcome by such condescension, Bouret fell on his knees and protested that if anything could console him for not having the honour of seeing the king follow the stag on his domain, it was of a surety the words he had just heard.

"Rise, Monsieur Bouret," said the monarch, "and assure Mme. Bouret that, as soon as this serious attack of gout leaves me, I will come and have midnight supper (*médianoche*) at your château, since hunting is forbidden me."

Then Bouret rose and attended the king to the door of his private apartments.

As Bouret quitted the Tuileries, it seemed to him that there was nothing more on earth to wish for. Suddenly, however, a new idea occurred to him. The king had said, "Assure Mme. Bouret"—this suggested a wife!

His Majesty—whose word was to him a command—should not be disappointed. Before that hunt-supper took place the château should have a mistress; and he married a cousin of Mme. de Pompadour.

But after the gout, Louis XV. had an attack of rheumatism and his health was completely shattered.

Each time Bouret spoke to the minister about the projected hunting party, the minister replied:

"His Majesty at present cannot leave Versailles. As soon as he is better he shall be reminded of your *fête*."

Meanwhile, like the life of the king, was the fortune of the financier on the decline. But before the day of ruin came he learned that the king had died of small-pox at Versailles.

"Il était écrit," said he, weeping, "que le roi ne mettrait pas le pied à mon château. Ni déjeuner, ni chasse, ni médianoche! Et je me suis marié," he added bitterly.

His own death—it was a violent one—occurred four years after that of his royal debtor and idol.

But how? He blew out his brains.

He was forgotten by his friends, and had become so poor that he was unable to borrow fifty louis!

The Château Bouret was demolished at the Revolution, its cellars alone resisting destruction.

The country people believed the cellars to extend far beneath the forest of Rougeaux, and that they were paved with gold pieces, and ingots, and diamonds, but guarded by powerful genii so that no person dared venture into the subterranean passages.

A popular legend relates that a trumpeter returned from the wars was told the story, but laughing at the fears of the peasants protested that he would go down and bring forth the treasures.

A crowd accompanied him to the entrance of the cellars ; he descended and was lost in the darkness. The flourish of his trumpet was heard at intervals, between which he was supposed to be filling his pockets with gold and diamonds. All night the music seemed to fly about fitfully beneath the ground, but at dawn was silent. The rash trumpeter had no doubt perished, a victim to his temerity.

Three times a year the peasants affirm these sounds are heard beneath the forest. It is the spirit of the lost trumpeter, who never succeeded in finding his way back to earth.

A Romance of Modern London.

By CURTIS YORKE,

Author of "HUSH!" "THE MYSTERY OF BELGRAVE SQUARE," "THE BROWN PORTMANTEAU," "DUDLEY," "THE WILD RUTHVENS," "THAT LITTLE GIRL," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE ONE LITTLE WOMAN!"

"Then the round of weary duties, cold and formal, came to meet her,
With the life within departed that had given them each a soul;
And her sick heart even slighted gentle words that came to greet her,
For grief spread its shadowy pinions like a blight upon the whole."

A. A. PROCTOR.

"To be observed, when observation is not sympathy
Is simply to be tortured."

* * * * *

CYRIL NORTHBURGH was possessed of a peculiarly dogged and determined disposition. Indolent as he was, there was a good deal of the British bulldog about him. As his cousin Fay had said, he was singularly tenacious of once-harboured ideas.

True, he had relinquished one very deeply-rooted idea. He had convinced himself that he was bound in honour to give Bee up to happiness and the man he believed she loved. But, finding that the man in question had apparently shown no desire to take her to himself, and finding, too, that she was unhappy, lonely, and in poverty—ah, well! that changed the aspect of things considerably. She might turn to him yet.

Oh yes, he had his pride too, as well as other fellows—perhaps more than some. But honest manly love has a way of pitching pride out of the window upon occasion. Besides, Cyril's pride was too essentially a part of himself to interfere materially with his judgment.

After he had left Bee—on the night mentioned in my last chapter—she sat still for a long time, thinking. It had been very pleasant to see Cyril again—very pleasant. She was glad their

old friendship would be renewed—unmarred by any sentimental recollections. How delightful and satisfactory that was, to be sure!

He came very often to the small cottage at Camden Town after that first day. Old Mrs. Chandleur used quite to look forward to his visits, and grumbled sadly if the intervals between them were longer than usual. Bee looked forward to them too. And he really behaved very well. He never embarrassed the girl by alluding to their former engagement. He never showed in the slightest degree that he regretted what had happened. He schooled his voice and even his eyes, so that Bee felt almost as much at ease with him as she used to do in the old days with Douglas.

Fay had been much disappointed when the engagement was broken off. But now she was beginning to hope that "things might come right" yet. She would willingly have been Cyril's confidante had he given her the chance. But he never did. She rarely spoke to Bee of Cyril, wisely judging that it was best to leave her alone, and let her heart decide for her. And indeed Bee grew very fond of Cyril in these days—though not at all in the way he and Fay wished and hoped. It was a very changed and quiet little Bee who flitted about the tiny house in Camden Town. The work that had at first been such a pleasure to her, had now become a series of weary and painful tasks. She was always tired, and always felt ready to cry on the slightest provocation. In the first place she never got out—beyond the garden, that is to say; for she did not like to leave her grandmother alone. In the second place her rest was terribly broken; for the old lady insisted on her sharing her room, and kept her getting up and down pretty well all night, on one pretext or another.

One afternoon in May she was feeling particularly tired and down-hearted. She looked it, too; and Sir Cyril, who made his appearance about five o'clock, thought he had never seen her so wan and thin and depressed. A mad passionate longing to take care of her, to take her away from all poverty, and pain, and anxiety, surged up in his heart. But his face showed nothing of all this, and his voice held nothing more than frank kindness, as he greeted her and, as usual, followed her into the sunny kitchen.

The window was open ; the soft May wind stole in, laden with the scent of wall-flowers. But the fire was out, and the kettle wore a look of black discontent. As Bee stood in the searching sunlight, Cyril saw that she had been crying. Indeed her lips were quivering still.

"Dear child—what is it?" he said involuntarily, taking one of her hands gently in his.

"Oh nothing, nothing," she answered with a half-hysterical gasp. "I—I simply had a fit of the blues. That was all."

"You are looking very ill," he said in a tone of deep concern.

"This horrible life is not fit for you. You ought to have some kind of servant, Bee. And you ought to go out for a certain time every day!"

But she interrupted him with quite a gay little smile.

"You are quite mistaken, my dear Sir Cyril. This life suits me very well. You surprised me in the weakness of a good cry. Now that I have had it, I feel ever so much better. And as I have let the fire out, I shall have to light it again, and give granny her tea. Will you stay to supper, Cyril? Fay and Douglas are coming. I had a note from Fay this morning. Will you?"

"Certainly. With pleasure," he said, throwing to the winds his numerous engagements for the evening. "And about the fire? Can I help you?"

"I think not," was the grave answer. "You would blacken your hands and your cuffs. Don't you remember the last time?—when you lifted bits of coal in your handkerchief?—and I had to lend you one of mine, and you never gave me it back again?"

"Well!—my hands and my handkerchief will wash, won't they?" he said laughing, and ignoring her accusation.

So between them they lighted the fire, made the tea and toast, and carried it into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Chandleur was just waking up from her nap. She was a little cross to-night, declared that the tea was boiled and the toast burnt, and spoke to Bee several times in a way that made Sir Cyril feel more than savage.

"And so you expect your old friend Douglas Conrath and his wife to-night, I suppose?" she said, when she had finished her second cup. "He doesn't trouble us much with his visits now-a-

days. You see he's gone up in the world, and we've gone down. It makes all the difference."

Bee's lip trembled slightly. She, too, had felt hurt that Douglas so seldom came to see them. She knew it was not, as her grandmother hinted, because they were poor. He had much to occupy his time, of course. But still—Bee could not help thinking he might have spared an hour once in a way, if only for the sake of old times. How could she know the stern sense of duty that kept him away from her? How could she know how hard he strove to put her face—the one little woman's face!—out of his heart and vision? And not knowing, she misjudged him.

After tea Bee left Cyril and Mrs. Chandleur to entertain each other, and went into the kitchen in company with a penny cookery-book, to prepare supper, that she might give all her time to her expected guests. (She never thought of treating Cyril as a guest, you will observe.) Hither, after half an hour or so, she was followed by Cyril himself, he having been dismissed by Mrs. Chandleur with the following candid remarks.

"I know what your coming here so much means, Sir Cyril," she said, as she nodded her head over her knitting. "And I'm quite willing to give *my* consent. If I'd had my way, she'd have been your wife by now. So go away beside her. I'll do very well. If I want anything I'll let her know."

As he entered the kitchen, Bee looked up, with a slight frown, from her occupation of preparing a large fowl for roasting.

"Now, why didn't you stay with grannie?" she said.

"I came to help you," he answered cheerfully. "What on earth are you doing with that bird?" he added, surveying the fowl through his eyeglass.

"I am going to cook it, and have it cold for supper," she replied, with a deliciously important air.

Cyril looked on in silence, while Bee turned and pulled the unhappy bird this way and that, without any apparent object or result.

"What are you trying to do?" he asked at last.

Bee gave the fowl a vicious little poke in the ribs with a long bright skewer.

"I am trying to *truss* it!" she said desperately. "And to tell you the truth I don't know how."

"To truss it! What's that?" he inquired.

"According to the cookery-book, it means to fasten up its legs and arms in some queer way," she answered, giving it another despairing poke.

"Er—isn't there something inside to come out? Perhaps it means that?" suggested Sir Cyril, eyeing the victim doubtfully.

"Oh *no*!" in a quick, rather horrified tone. "They do that in the shops, you know."

"It seems all right," observed Cyril, after a brief and cautious examination. "But doesn't the cookery-book tell you about trussing, or whatever it is? Let us look."

"It's my own fault," said Bee disconsolately. "They asked me in the shop if I'd have it trussed; and I said I only wanted it cleaned and singed. To be honest, I didn't know what trussing meant."

"Ah—here you are," said Cyril, who had been overhauling the cookery-book. "'*Roast fowl. Skewer the bird firmly.*' Skewer it," he repeated, pulling his moustache thoughtfully. "I suppose that means the same as trussing it. But it doesn't say how you do it. '*Flour it well, and cover it with well-greased kitchen-paper.*' Kitchen-paper. What's that?"

"I don't know," was the despairing answer.

"Let's ask Mrs. Chandleur," suggested Sir Cyril, pulling the bird gingerly towards him by one leg.

"I did ask her. But she only said, 'Skewer the legs and wings.'"

"Pooh, well—never mind. Leave them alone. I don't suppose it makes much difference."

"I shall just have to," she said. "It's time it was put down to the fire. It has to be basted, you know."

"Basted?" he repeated, looking mystified.

"Yes—the gravy poured over it, you know."

"Oh, I'll do that for you. By the way," he added, with a sudden inspiration, "shouldn't it be stuffed with something? They generally are, aren't they? The same kind of stuffing they put in turkeys, you know," he continued in a vaguely explanatory sort of way.

"Cyril—I may as well confess I don't know how to stuff it either. I don't know what *made* me get a fowl. We've never

had one before, since we came here. And I always thought it would be such an easy thing to cook. You know I never learned cooking ; and grannie seems to think I should know everything by intuition."

It ended in the wretched bird being stuffed with such ingredients as were at hand, minus several mentioned in the cookery-book. It was then put down to the fire with half a sheet of buttered letter-paper on its innocent bosom ; and Cyril—to such base uses can our manhood come !—basted it profusely and laboriously while Bee went to change her dress.

Half an hour later Fay and Douglas arrived—the former looking brighter than Bee had seen her look for a long time, if a little languid, Douglas grave and somewhat silent as usual. His manner towards Bee had of late been characterized by a certain coldness and constraint, which had hurt her more than she could have believed possible. Could it be, she thought sadly, that this was the same gentle, tender Douglas of her childhood ? Was it true—as Fay said—that his married life had disappointed him ? Or—worse still—was it true that success had spoiled him ?

Just at sunset, when they all went out into the quiet little garden, she found herself walking down the narrow garden-path beside him. Cyril, Fay, and Mrs. Chandleur were a few paces on in front.

"You are looking very pale and thin, Bee—are you not ?" he said, and there was no lack of tender concern in his dark blue eyes now, as he looked down upon her.

"I suppose I must be," she made answer soberly. "Every one is making the most uncomplimentary remarks upon my personal appearance."

"It is a dull miserable life for you, poor child," he said compassionately. Then impelled by an overmastering impulse he added, in somewhat abrupt tones, "Bee—have you never regretted giving Sir Cyril his dismissal ?"

For answer she laughed a little.

"He doesn't look very broken-hearted, does he ?" she said. "So why should I be ?"

"But you know he cares for you still ?" he went on steadily, with a certain fierce pleasure in this mode of self-torture. "You know that he would marry you to-morrow if you would let him."

"Would he?"

"You know he would. And, Bee, he has been very patient—very loyal. Are you so sure you could not be happy as—as his wife?"

"Yes," was the curt, almost harsh answer—"I am very sure I could not be happy as his wife. I told you that once before, Douglas. And that I may not have to tell you again, I had better tell you that I can't care for Cyril because—because I once cared for some one else—some one who never thought of asking me to be his wife. And—if I allowed myself to think it—I'm afraid I care for him still."

She was looking straight before her—her eyes flashing through angry tears. The next moment she had turned and gone into the house.

Douglas walked on, gazing unseeingly at the irregular boxwood borders, at the daisies on the little grass-plot, at the nodding wall-flowers. A numb kind of jealousy surged about his heart. So she could love—this sweetly-cold little girl—this new-old Bee? It seemed incredible to him that *she* should love without return. And, if not Sir Cyril, whom did she love? He felt strangely stirred—strangely shaken.

"And so they tell me you've brought out a new book, Mr. Conrath," said Mrs. Chandleur some time later, when they were all sitting at the supper-table, and Douglas was carving the famous fowl. "I hope it's easier to read than the last; for I could neither make head nor tail of it."

"You and I may shake hands, then, Mrs. Chandleur," said Fay laughing. "It was beyond me too. But the reviews have been splendid."

"I have only seen one—in the *Standard*," said Bæ. "And it said the book was clever, but realistic to the verge of brutality."

Douglas smiled slightly. His novel had been a success. He could afford to forgive the accusation of brutality.

"Well," observed Fay, shrugging her shoulders, "I don't mind confessing that I skipped half of it, and shuddered at the other half. I think it *was* almost brutal—parts of it."

"Real life is apt to be brutal," said her husband quietly—"looked at in certain aspects."

"There is a tendency in the present age to evince a ghoulish pleasure in digging up, and putting under a public microscope

what George Eliot has called 'the invincible remnants of the brute' in mankind," observed Sir Cyril, who was languidly cutting up a brown loaf. "And the public like it. They find in it what they suspect in others, and know in themselves. As for myself, I might almost emulate our friend Max Fenwicke, and say that I never read but two English novels in my life, and that one was *Adam Bede*, and the other—wasn't."

"Then you are hardly a competent judge, are you?" said Conrath coldly.

"Talking of Mr. Fenwicke," put in Bee, giving a judicious turn to the conversation, "where *is* he? I have not heard anything of him for ever so long."

"He is in Africa—enthusiastically prospecting gold-mines," Douglas answered with a half-smile.

"How goes the Cornish mine?" asked Cyril, without much appearance of interest.

"Oh, very well. Debenham and I are alone in it now, you know. Fenwicke made over his share to us just before he left England."

"What! Made you a present of it?" asked Fay, opening her eyes very wide.

"No, my dear," replied her husband, somewhat drily. "We don't live in Utopia—yet."

After supper they had some music; for Bee's piano had been one of the things saved from the sale at Portland Place.

I think I have told you that Fay sang very sweetly? She practised every day with painstaking care; for her singing was the one bond between her and her husband. It seemed to her the one thing she could do to give him pleasure. To-night she was in specially good voice.

"Won't you sing, Bee?" said Cyril suddenly.

Fay had just risen from the piano, after softly playing the concluding bars of Beethoven's *Adelaide*, which was a particular favourite of Douglas's.

"I think I don't want to sing to-night, Cyril," Bee answered quickly.

"Yes, do," he persisted in his lazy quiet voice. "Sing that quaint little thing you sometimes hum when you are waiting for the kettle to boil," he added after a pause. "'*Synnöve's Lied*,' I think you said it was. One of Kjerulf's, isn't it?"

Bee went reluctantly to the piano, which stood in a shadowy corner, somewhat out of the lamp-light. She was in no mood for singing to-night, and would rather have sung any other song than poor Synnöve's pathetic lament.

She played the symphony slowly and lingeringly. Then her fresh young voice, with a half thrill of tears in it, rose and fell through the little room, giving to the weirdly beautiful air an added pathos :

"Oh, to remember the happy hours!—

The pleasant childhood we spent together—

The days of sunlight, and birds and flowers.—

What did we know of wintry weather?—

We thought our playing must never cease,—

We thought our flowers would bloom for ever.—

Our world was bounded by the garden trees—

Then came the churchyard and the river!

But now the garden is white with snow,—

At night I wait, I stand and shiver,—

The place is frosty, the cold winds blow,—

Ah love, my love, but you come never."

The sweet voice sank into a shivering half-heard breath. The curious little accompaniment wailed and sobbed itself into silence.

For a few seconds no one spoke.

Cyril was looking intently at Douglas, who was leaning back in his chair with folded arms—his face very pale, his teeth pressed hard upon his under-lip, his eyes bent upon Bee's dimly-seen profile with a look of passionate intensity that Cyril knew. For it had been in his own eyes many a time.

Fay's voice broke the stillness.

"Why do you sing such sad songs, Bee?" she said plaintively. "You make me want to cry."

Douglas moved slightly, and his eyes met Cyril's. What he saw there told him that his carefully-guarded secret had escaped him. But his face was as haughtily defiant as Cyril's was coldly accusing and resentful.

Shortly afterwards the Conraths took their leave, for the carriage had been waiting some little time. Cyril said good-night also, somewhat curtly negating Fay's suggestion that he should drive so far with them.

Mrs. Chandleur went to bed almost immediately. It was only half-past nine, but the old lady was tired and cross. Bee, having assisted her grandmother as usual, came downstairs again, and turned into the deserted sitting-room. For a few minutes she walked restlessly up and down the room, trying to shut out from her heart the memory of Douglas's face, his voice, the clasp of his hand. Then she sat down at the table and hid her face in her arms, and prayed—poor lonely child!—that God would take away that strange wicked love from her heart; and that He would give her strength to live the rest of her life without it. And as she prayed, heavy bursting sobs shook her—sobs that would have wrung the heart of any who loved her to see and hear. When a few minutes had passed, she stopped crying, and putting her hand to her neck, drew out a slender ribbon, from which hung a plain gold locket. It held a photograph of Douglas—Douglas as he was ten years ago—a stern, yet boyish face, with a firmly-set mouth, and heavily-lashed dark eyes. It was not Douglas at his best; but it was the only likeness of him Bee had, and one of her greatest treasures. She looked at it tearlessly for a long time. Then, with trembling but deliberate fingers, she took it out of the locket and laid it on the table.

"I will burn it," she whispered with a dry little sob. "It will be better—far better. Oh, my dear—my dear."

And she pressed a kiss of innocent passion on the pictured eyes that seemed to look at her so tenderly under all their stern gravity.

Then a new storm of grief shook her. She sobbed and cried as she had never sobbed and cried before—burying her head in her hands in a perfect abandonment of hopeless despairing sorrow. She did not hear a gentle knock at the front door—did not hear it open—did not hear a footstep in the passage without.

Then a voice—Cyril's voice—said in a tone of shocked concern,

"Good God, Bee!—what is the matter?"

She sprang up with a little cry.

"Cyril! How you startled me! What is it? Why have you come back?"

"I came back," he said, looking very pale and determined—"because I—couldn't stay away, I suppose. I—had a question.

to ask you. Did I startle you? Forgive me. I knocked, but you did not hear me; and finding the door not yet fastened, and the lights not out—I came in. Bee, my dear—are you so unhappy? Can I do nothing?”

“No, no—nothing,” she answered inarticulately.

“Won’t you let me comfort you, Bee?” he whispered, taking her hand gently in his. “Won’t you let me take your poor sad little heart into my keeping once more—let me protect you and shield you from all grief—as your husband, Bee?”

But she shook her head.

“Never, Bee?” And his voice trembled.

“Never, Cyril.”

She put up both her hands to her face; and then—Cyril saw the poor, tear-stained little photograph. He recognized it at once, and drew a quick sharp breath.

“So—it is he who has come between us?” he said harshly.

Bee raised her head, and with a strange little cry, caught up the bit of cardboard, and held it tightly in her shut hand.

There was a short silence. Cyril was deathly pale. He sat down, and leaning his elbow on the table, pressed one hand over his eyes. Bee—white too with a wild, breathless terror—stood watching him.

He, for his part, felt horribly shocked. He did not try to analyze his feelings further—just then.

“Cyril—Cyril”—wailed the girl with a half-sob in her voice that went straight to his heart—“don’t judge me too hardly! Don’t despise me! I—I couldn’t help it!”

With a violent effort he pulled himself together, and rose to his feet.

“Bee—my poor little Bee,” was all he said.

“Go now”—she murmured. “Ah, Cyril—my dear kind friend Cyril—leave me now.”

And he left her.

“Damn him!” he muttered, as he walked quickly down the narrow street in the shimmering spring moonlight. “Damn him!”

* * * * *

Cyril only came once more to the small house in Camden Town, and that was to say good-bye. He was going to join a party of men who intended shooting “big game” in Africa, and

the date of his return was uncertain. He looked pale and unlike himself, Bee thought, and he only stayed a few minutes. When he had said good-bye to Mrs. Chandleur, he drew Bee into the quiet sunny kitchen, and said in a hoarse voice,

"Good-bye, Bee. I shall not trouble you again. But remember, my dear, if you should change your mind—or if you should ever want me to do anything for you—one word will bring me to you, wherever I am. I shall never change—I shall never love any other woman. Think of me sometimes, Bee, if only for the sake of—what we once were to each other."

He wrung her hands almost painfully. Then—before she quite realized that he was going—he was gone.

Bee cried herself to sleep that night. It seemed to her that she had lost a dear and valued friend.

* * * * *

On the night before Cyril left England, he went to say good-bye to his cousin Fay. She was alone in the pretty, flower-scented drawing-room when he came in, and she was struck by the curiously haggard and dispirited look his usually tranquil features wore. It was a look of set endurance of pain, that seemed to alter the whole character of his personality. Fay felt very sorry for him. She had never seen him look like that before.

"My poor Cyril," she said softly, when the light conversation she had begun flagged hopelessly, "my poor Cyril—you are feeling it very much, I can see."

He made no answer, beyond a slight impatient movement of the arm that rested on the mantelpiece. He did not ask her what she meant; because he knew.

"I know"—she went on—"though you have not told me. I think she has treated you shamefully."

A quick spasm passed over his clear-cut face. Just for a moment he let his head fall on his arm.

"Don't, please"—he said in a choked kind of voice—"unless you want to see me make an utter fool of myself."

It was so unheard-of that Cyril should display any manner of emotion, that his evident agitation now, impressed his cousin deeply. And in her heart she judged Bee unsparingly.

It was an intense relief to her when after a minute he raised his head, and spoke in his usual voice.

"I'm afraid you'll find me very dull company to-night, Fay," he said, with rather a poor attempt at a smile. "I only looked in for a few minutes to let you see the last of me."

"The last of you?" she echoed. "Why—how long are you going to stay away?"

"I don't know."

As he spoke he drew a chair near to hers and sat down.

"Where is your husband?" he asked abruptly.

"He will be here directly, I think. He went to lie down just before dinner, because, he said, he did not feel well enough to eat anything. He has not been at all well lately. The doctors say he is working far too hard. And so he is. He seems to me neither to sleep, nor eat, nor rest."

Her voice faltered. Then she added, with a wistful upward look at her companion,

"Do *you* think he looks ill, Cyril?"

"Oh, every fellow looks out of sorts at times," he answered shortly. "He seemed all right the last time I saw him."

After a minute he added, with a very gentle inflection in his voice,

"Does he make you happy, my little cousin? Is your married life all you hoped it would be?"

She did not answer immediately. Then she said in a quivering undertone,

"He is very, very kind to me."

"He has not sunk the lover in the husband, then?" he went on, taking one of her hands, and speaking very earnestly.

"He has never changed to me, Cyril. Why do you ask?"

"Because—I wanted to know," he answered quietly.

"And you?—you love him as you did when you were first engaged to him?" he continued presently.

She grew very white.

"I love him as I always did," she answered with a kind of anguished cry. "Better than my life; better than my hope of Heaven; better than he will ever love me—God help me!" And she hid her face in her hands.

Cyril muttered something inaudible between his strong white teeth, and rising, he paced once the length of the room and back again.

Fay had risen too, and nervously grasped his arm.

"You must not think that Douglas—that it is his fault," she said in a quick agitated voice—"It is only that I—that I——"

"I understand," he said very quietly. "You need not be afraid of my misunderstanding your husband, Fay."

Just then the door opened, and Conrath himself entered. Fay rose hurriedly and left the room.

The two men greeted each other with marked constraint. Conrath was really looking ill; and Cyril, surveying him keenly, felt a savage satisfaction in the fact.

"You are leaving to-morrow, Fay tells me?" said Douglas, throwing himself wearily into a chair.

"Yes—I am leaving to-morrow. You are not looking well," he added after a brief pause.

"No—I am not feeling well."

"What is the matter?"

"I don't know."

Cyril leaned his back against the mantelpiece for a few seconds without speaking. Then he said suddenly,

"I am going to ask you a question which I am aware I have not the slightest right to ask. But—for reasons of my own—I wish to be satisfied on the point. Why did you marry my cousin Fay?"

Conrath's face assumed a look of haughty amazement.

"Why did I marry her, Sir Cyril? Why do men usually marry women? I married her because I——" He stopped and bit his lips angrily.

"You did not love her," pursued the other deliberately. "And she knows it. She is a sensitive little creature—quick to feel slights or neglect——"

"Has my wife been complaining to you of my neglect?" said Douglas in a curiously still voice, as Sir Cyril paused.

"No—she has not. Therefore do not visit my unwarrantable interference upon her. But I can see—have seen for some time—that she is not happy——"

Conrath interrupted him.

"Am I wrong in supposing that my wife's happiness is a matter between her and myself?" he said icily.

Cyril's usually colourless face flushed a little.

"I have already told you that I am aware of that," he said

quietly. "Nevertheless, as my cousin is both ill and unhappy, I would ask you—in common humanity—not to allow her to see what I saw the other night—that you love another woman, and—*what* other woman."

The eyes of the two men met; and there was a minute's silence.

Conrath had grown deadly white. He felt sick and cold. And yet there was a certain quiet dignity in the pale face he turned towards Sir Cyril—a dignity which impressed the latter in spite of himself.

"There are certain things that do not admit of explanation nor discussion, Sir Cyril," he said coldly. "If it is my misfortune to have cared nearly all my life for a woman who never thought of me except as a dear and trusted friend—and if you have surprised a secret I would have given many years of my life to have kept, I can only trust to your generosity to respect my secret. As for my motives in asking your cousin to be my wife, I can only repeat that that is a matter which concerns ourselves alone. God knows I have done my best to make her happy. I have failed, you tell me," he added unsteadily. "I—had thought, of late, that it was otherwise——"

He broke off suddenly; for the door opened, and Fay herself entered. Cyril—seeing her quick anxious glance at Conrath's white face—turned to her at once.

"I am just going, Fay," he said in his usual languid tones. "Wish me *bon voyage* and all that sort of thing."

Then he held out his hand to Douglas, with more cordiality than he had shown for a considerable time. Indeed a curious pity for his cousin's husband obtruded itself on his former hostility of feeling.

"Goodbye, Conrath," he said. "Er—are you coming downstairs?"

The other accompanied him down to the hall, and Cyril said frankly,

"Look here, Conrath—I said, perhaps, more than I had any right to say. And I see that my words cut deeper than I—er—intended. As you say, no one has any right to interfere between husband and wife. And—er—hang it all!—you took it better than I'd have taken it. So let us part friends, you know, and that," he concluded lucidly.

Conrath took the hand the speaker held out to him, and pressed it hard.

"Yes—I understand," he said, with a somewhat forced smile: "It's all right."

So they parted, these two, with perhaps kindlier feelings towards each other than they had ever had before.

Douglas went slowly upstairs again, and into the drawing-room. Cyril Northburgh was right, he thought, as he caught sight of his wife's pale, sad little face. She did not look happy. Nevertheless he resented the fact, and, as most men would have done, resented further that he had been told of it by one of her family.

"Are you feeling worse, Douglas?" she said, coming up to him and laying her hand anxiously on his arm.

An irritably impatient answer rose to his lips. For if you are feeling seedy and out of sorts and don't quite know what is the matter with you, there are few things more exasperating than to be continually asked how you are, or if you feel better. But as he met the gentle love-light in her eyes, and remembered her indifferent health, her love for him, and his want of love for her, all the man in him rose up to reproach him. Without speaking, he put his arm round her and kissed her. After all, she *did* love him. And she was all he had.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GHOST OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN!

"'There is no God!' the foolish saith,
But none, 'There is no sorrow,'
And nature oft the cry of faith,
In bitter need will borrow;
Eyes, which the preacher could not school,
By wayside graves are raised,
And lips say, 'God be pitiful,'
Who ne'er said, 'God be praised!'
Be pitiful, O God!"

E. B. BROWNING.

THE days passed slowly and monotonously enough in the little household at Camden Town after Cyril had gone. Mrs. Chand-leur, too, was more *difficile* than ever, resenting Sir Cyril's departure as a special insult to herself.

"I know you refused him," she kept saying fretfully to Bee. "And what you are thinking of I'm sure I don't know. There's not one man in fifty would have come forward as he did, and given you another chance of being 'my lady.' I declare I've no patience with you. I don't know what you're waiting for—or if you expect one of the royal princes to make you an offer."

"Oh, grannie, I wish you wouldn't," said Bee on one of these occasions, when the above tenor of remarks had become intolerably rasping and monotonous. "I don't want to be married to anybody. Isn't that enough?"

"Fiddlestick's end!—don't want to be married. The girl isn't born that doesn't want to be married. Don't tell *me*."

"Grannie—you *used* to be kind to me," broke out the poor girl with a half-choked sob. "Don't make me feel as if I were a burden to you. I do my best to—to be all that you wish."

"Well, there, there—don't cry, child," said the old lady testily. "I'm sure it's long past my tea-time—and not a sign of it yet."

Bee, with a swelling heart, went away to prepare it.

Everybody seemed changed and hardened, she thought, sadly enough, as she waited for the kettle to boil. Grannie, and Douglas, and of late even Fay. Only Cyril had always been uniformly kind and gentle—and she had sent Cyril away! But she did not regret her refusal to marry him. She respected and liked him too thoroughly to give him mere friendship and liking in return for passionate love; and she knew she could never give him anything warmer.

It was ten days now since he had gone. And how she missed him already!

"Goodness knows when he will come back again," Fay said in a vexed voice, one day when she was spending the afternoon in the little house in Camden Town. "I must say, Bee, I think you have treated the dear fellow very badly. Both Douglas and I hoped you would have rewarded his patience at last."

"It is very kind of you and Douglas to interest yourselves in my love affairs," said Bee coldly.

Then she suddenly began to cry. Upon which Fay took her penitently in her arms, and petted her, and declared that she

(Bee) was working herself to death, and that she (Fay) was a cruel, thoughtless thing. And so on, and so on—until, with tears and caresses and murmured loving words, their old friendship was renewed once more.

"I want you to come and dine with us next Thursday," said Fay, when they were comparatively composed. "Do come, darling. It won't matter, your wearing black. It is just to be the quietest little dinner, not more than ten or a dozen. And I want you to stay all night. No, no, it *isn't* impossible. For Mrs. Chandleur shall come to us too. We will send the brougham for her. She won't want to see any one, of course. But she shall have the green room, and be as cosy as possible. And you can run up to see her whenever you like."

And so it was arranged, after considerable demur and many objections on Bee's part. But Fay would take no denial.

The little dinner went off very pleasantly; and Bee thoroughly enjoyed moving once more among one or two of the old set, and forgetting the somewhat sordid existence which would begin again to-morrow.

Douglas was grave, gentle, courteous, as usual. Nevertheless Bee knew that one of his moods of intolerable depression was upon him. Fay knew it too. The latter had had one of her hysterical fits that afternoon, although to-night she looked so gay and bright you would hardly have believed it. And she had said some very bitter, cruel things—things that her husband found it difficult either to forget or forgive. For his part he was feeling horribly nervous and ill. It was quite true—as Fay had told Cyril—that he had been working too hard—that he took but little rest or food, and slept hardly at all. He was dimly conscious himself that he was burning the candle at both ends. But his writing seemed the only refuge from himself and his torturing thoughts. He wrote feverishly, almost fiercely. And his work at this time was almost painfully realistic and powerful. The critics said it "showed marvellous insight, and grasp of the human soul." They did not know that it was written with the author's heart's-blood.

Naturally, this continual holding of the emotions at high pressure—for he was one of those unfortunate authors who lose themselves in the characters they create—told radically upon his nervous system. And when he let the pressure lift a little, there

was always Fay to be soothed and reasoned out of some fit of tearful melancholy, or to be calmed and caressed through some wildly-passionate paroxysm of hysterical crying—as to-day. And above all, there was always his heart to hide from her.

I do not expect you to pity him. Hundreds of men have suffered as cruelly as he suffered—perhaps more cruelly—and have got over it, and none been the wiser, beyond the fact of an acquaintance or two, or a chum or two, remarking that “So-and-so” is looking “out of sorts,” or “seedy,” or the like. And thus in the irritability and nervousness born of his failing health, he had grown to actually dread these scenes with his wife—to dread them with a curious, uncontrollable horror. Sometimes her reproaches came so near—so fatally near the truth.

On this particular night it so happened that Bee could not sleep; and remembering that Douglas had given her the corrected proofs of his forthcoming novel to read, and that she had left them on the table in his study, she put on her dressing-gown and slippers, lit a candle, and ran downstairs to get them. The house was all dark and quiet. But as she gently opened the study door, she saw with a start that the lamp was lighted, and that Douglas himself sat at the table. He still wore his evening dress, and was leaning his head on his hands as if in deep or painful thought. Bee was just about to go softly away, when he raised his head and saw her.

“Bee!” he exclaimed, starting to his feet. “What is it? Is Fay—is she ill?”

“No, no,” she answered quickly. “I am so sorry I have startled you. I thought every one was in bed. I came down for the proofs you said I might read. I forgot to take them upstairs with me.”

He went back to the table, turned over a lot of papers, and handed her the bunch of proofs she wanted.

“Douglas—is anything the matter? You look so white—so strange,” she said looking up at him with her clear, childlike eyes.

“Oh no, nothing is the matter,” he answered drearily. “I—I suppose I am not well. That is all.”

As he spoke he sat down again, and covered his eyes with his hand. Somehow another night rose keenly in his memory. He

seemed to see his old self—a despairing, poverty-stricken lad in impotent raging resentment against his destiny. He saw the bare sordid room, the guttering candle—heard the sweep of the snow against the window. And then—and then he saw a tiny, white-robed child's figure, an earnest child's face, with round innocent pitying eyes—felt the soft cheek against his own, the little arms round his neck——

Ah! why had Bee—the new Bee—the Bee of his manhood—come to him now—to-night?

"Don't go, Bee," he said inarticulately. "It is not so very late. And—and I hardly ever see you now. Never mind your dressing-gown," he added, with a curious smile, as she hesitated. "It is very pretty—and it covers up your neck and arms, which your equally pretty dinner-gown did not do. Stay and talk to me a little, Bee."

A strange look came into her soft eyes.

"No—I must go now," she said hurriedly. "I would not have come if I had known you—you were here."

"Why?" he asked harshly, rising and coming towards her. "Are you afraid of me, then? Afraid to be here with me alone—at midnight—only you and I? Well—perhaps you are right. Perhaps—you had better go."

"Good-night then, Douglas," she said, raising two troubled eyes to his.

"Good-night," he answered, taking the little hand she held out to him.

The soft warm touch of it thrilled him through and through. Every pulse in his body throbbed wildly.

She trembled too, and her eyes filled with unwilling tears. At the sight of them he drew her a little nearer to him by the hand he still held.

"What is it, child?" he said unsteadily. "Why do you look so sad? Has your life been shipwrecked—too? It—it seems impossible. You told me once that you—you cared for some one. What is the fellow made of—if he does not care for you? Who is he, Bee? Surely you might trust me—whom you used to call—your brother."

As he spoke he bent his head to look into her averted face.

A fierce crimson flooded her cheeks, then receded, and left

them deathly pale. She turned a swift, sudden look upon him; then wrenching her fingers from his, she sat down at the table, and covered her face with her hands.

But—he had seen her eyes.

An incredulous shock of passionate surprise shivered through him; then, as he realized all her agitation meant, his blood ran fast and fierily. But the next instant his delirious vision of what might have been was kept to earth by the stern knowledge of what was. He felt stunned and giddy.

"My God!" he said under his breath. "My God!"

He flung himself into a chair, his hands opening and shutting nervously and convulsively. He had had a good deal to bear that day. This was just the last straw. "It might have been! It *might* have been!" shrieked in his ears, and tore at his heart. And he bent his head on his outstretched arms, and sobbed like a child or a woman.

In an instant Bee was at his side—on her knees. She did not know what her eyes had betrayed. Just now—I doubt if she would have cared. She forgot that she loved him. She did not know that he loved her. She only knew that he was in some unknown trouble, and—womanlike—she longed to comfort him.

"Douglas—Douglas," she whispered—"can't you tell me what it is?"

He regained his self-control almost immediately, but remained quite still, his face still hidden in his arms. He felt her little hand on his wrist. He took the hand in one of his, and pressed it gently. He felt utterly heart-weary and broken in spirit, and her sympathy was sweet to him.

Presently he raised his head and said in a low voice,

"You will think me—very weak, Bee. But—I have had much to bear lately. And to-night—to-night——"

He stopped, and bit his lip nervously.

"I know—I know," she whispered. "I suppose we all have, dear Douglas. And no one can help us. No one but God."

He was looking at her with a curious wistfulness in his dark eyes.

"Have you said your prayers to-night, Bee?" he said almost inaudibly.

"No—not yet," she answered.

"Then—say them now," he went on, his voice sinking lower yet. "Say them now—before you rise from your knees. In the old, old childish days you said your prayers kneeling beside me. I hear the echo of them sometimes still. Pray with all your heart, Bee—pray that comfort may come to you—and to me—and strength to bear—what we have to bear."

For the time, she too seemed carried back to her childish days.

"Yes, Douglas," she answered with a half sob. And she bent her head reverently on her clasped hands.

She looked like some small saint kneeling there, her tawny hair flowing over her shoulders, her long lashes sweeping her pale cheeks, her whole body so still—so still. Who knew how her heart was beating?

The man beside her bowed his head too, and for the first time since his childhood, he too sent up a trembling, uncertain, silent petition to the God he had neglected all his life—the God who is never entreated in vain.

And the prayer was from his heart, and in the earnest conceiving of it, the passion-cloud that had held him slowly ebbed and melted away.

A few minutes passed. Then Bee rose to her feet. He rose also. No verbal good-night passed between them this time. She gave him her hands silently; and he took them and raised them to his lips.

"God bless you, my little sister," he said in a low broken voice, "You—you don't know how you have comforted me! God knows I—wanted it."

"I am glad if I have comforted you," she said simply—"if only to pay off part of the unpayable debt of kindness I have owed you all my life. No one is like you, Douglas—no one!"

A harsh laugh made them both start; and turning, they saw that Fay stood at the door, her eyes blazing, her cheeks a vivid crimson. If any one had thought of it, she was looking almost beautiful.

"So—I have found you out at last!" she said, in a strange panting underbreath. "I have found you out at last! My husband and—my *friend*! I have been very dense—very blind—very confiding. But now—I know!"

She stopped, for her husband had come quickly up to her and laid his hand on her arm. To him the re-action was horrible.

"Good God, Fay—what do you mean?" he said sternly.

"What do I mean?" she repeated slowly, a terrible smile curving her thin lips. "I think—for Miss Adeane's sake—you had better not ask me—what I mean!"

He grew white about the mouth.

"You had better go back to your room," he said, in a low suppressed voice.

"And leave you here with her alone?" she answered with an unlovely laugh. "Well, yes—perhaps I had better. Ha, ha! And so it is she you have cared for all these months? Even when you asked me to marry you—you cared for her! And she—ah, now I remember so many things!—she has always cared for you too. *That* was why she would not marry poor Cyril. Oh my God! how you have deceived me! And how *she* has deceived me! And this!—the culminating insult! In my own house—to make an appointment to meet you here—at midnight—so that you might tell her how you loved her, and how you longed for the time when I—poor fool who came between!—should be out of the way, that you might *legitimately* give her the place you have never given to me."

Again she paused; for there was something terrible in the look her husband turned upon her.

"Be silent!" he said between his teeth. "By Heaven! if you say another word you will make me forget that you are a woman—and my wife."

There was a moment's silence. Bee was crouching back against the wall, her hands pressed against her heart, her eyes dilated with a wild incredulous horror.

"Bee, don't look like that!" Douglas exclaimed almost fiercely. "She does not mean it—she does not know what she is saying."

"Oh yes, I know what I am saying," shrieked his wife excitedly. "And you and she know too—only too well."

"Fay—for the love of *God*!" uttered Douglas, laying an unwittingly cruel grasp on her arm.

Then—at last—Bee spoke.

"Let me go," she gasped, in a low hoarse voice. "I cannot bear it. Douglas—let me go now."

But his arm barred her passage to the door.

"You shall not go," he said with white lips—"until my—my wife—has taken back her insulting words to you."

"Ah yes—take her part against me, of course!" cried Fay, almost beside herself. "That was to be expected. Oh, why can't I die—and be out of your way? But I will die—I will kill myself—and then—and then you can be happy—when I am in my grave!" Her voice rose to a long sobbing scream; she threw up her hands wildly, and would have fallen, had not her husband caught her in his arms. She had fainted.

"Thank God!" he muttered agitatedly, as he bent to look at the closed eyes and pale cheeks.

He himself was as white as death. Bee saw that his hands were trembling.

"Bee"—he said, turning to her, and speaking in a voice that she hardly recognized—"forgive her. She has been so nervous and excitable of late. She did not mean all she said."

"No, no—I know it," the girl interrupted him passionately. "Don't even *spec* of it."

"I am going to carry her upstairs," he went on hurriedly. "I'm afraid to think what the consequences of all this excitement and agitation may be. It's horribly unfortunate."

With a heavy sigh, he lifted his unconscious wife in his arms, and carried her up to her room.

A little later the whole house was in a commotion; for its young mistress was alarmingly ill. And before morning Douglas's baby-daughter was born.

Many sad, anxious days followed; for Fay came very near the death she had so passionately and unheedingly desired—so near, that one night the newly-made father paced his study far into the dawn, dreading each moment the news that might come to him.

The poor, passionate, spoiled, loving little woman! His anger against her had died away. A gnawing remorse tugged at his heartstrings—a strange, terrible remorse, that whispered what he dared not hear.

They would not let him see his wife, for all excitement had to be avoided for her. And only once had he seen the tiny morsel of humanity who had promoted him to fatherhood. Such a

weird, shrunken little creature! with an old, old face, and preternaturally solemn eyes. Douglas felt half afraid of it. It seemed to accuse him silently with its premature entrance into this sorrowful world.

At last one day they brought him word that his wife wished to see him. She was restless, they said, and asked for him continually. So he followed Lady Dinwoodie into the sick-room, and knelt beside Fay's pillow. She put out two thin little hands to him, and he clasped them in his. Then he took her in his arms, and bent his head and kissed her. He did not speak. He could not, just then. His lips were quivering, and his eyes were dim.

After some time Fay stirred a little in his arms.

"Douglas"—she whispered feebly but eagerly, "have you seen it? The baby?—our little baby?"

"Yes, dear," he said unsteadily.

"It is very pretty, is it not?" she went on, looking up at him with wistful eyes.

"I only saw it for a moment or two," he answered, smiling faintly. "And I am not a judge of babies, I'm afraid. But its eyes—I thought they reminded me of yours, Fay."

She gave a little sigh of content, and smiled. Then Lady Dinwoodie took Douglas away.

Fay gained strength but slowly. She was so thin and fragile that she was a mere featherweight in her husband's strong arms as he lifted her daily from her bed to the sofa, and from the sofa back to bed again.

Strangely enough—but to Douglas's inexpressible relief—she never mentioned that terrible night in his study. It seemed to have passed away from her brain—to be blotted out, as it were. Only once, as they sat in the summer twilight, she said to him with a pained, anxious drawing together of her brows,

"Douglas—there seems to be something that I can't remember—something that half comes back to me, and then flits away again—something that happened, surely, just before baby was born. I have a dim recollection of being half mad with terror—or was it anger?—and then of your being very angry with me, and saying such dreadful cruel things. Douglas," agitatedly, "help me to remember."

He put his arm round her, and pressed her head down on his breast that she might not see how pale he had grown. But she felt him shudder, as at a ghastly memory.

"Douglas," she repeated, with a piteous insistence, "what was it?"

"You were very ill, Fay," he said in a low steady voice. "And you were frightened, and—came for me. After that you were delirious—and doubtless imagined many things."

"Ah yes, that must have been it," she said in a relieved voice. "I am so glad. It—troubled me."

"Then don't let it trouble you any more," he said. "Every one has unpleasant fancies in illness."

But he looked white and anxious, and sat for a long time silently and absently pulling his moustache with strong nervous fingers. He was thinking—well, he was thinking of Bee. He had not seen her since the morning after that memorable night. She had come twice to ask for Fay, just at first—but not lately.

Conrath had fought hard against his passion. But even now—with his wife's head resting on his heart, his arm folded round her, their child sleeping in its cradle by their side—even now he was conscious of a sick longing for that other woman whose lightest touch was dearer to him than his wife's whole body. A maddening necessity to be near her, to hear her voice, to look into her deep calm eyes—clear in their never-dying childhood—came over him and shook his soul. He let the dear forbidden love creep round his heart, and held it there.

It was wrong, of course. Oh yes, he knew that as well as you do—better, perhaps. But the sense of his wrong-doing did not affect him much. When the body is weak and the vital power below par, the moral perceptions are apt to be dulled. And he was physically very tired, and mentally feverish and unstrung. I suppose these days and nights of watching and remorseful anxiety had told upon him.

So, to-night, he sat "stabbing desire with the sword of despair," and strove with all his man's strength of will to take command of his nature. It had been a most strangely bitter-sweet shock to him—the discovery that Bee loved him. And again the mocking ghost of "what might have been" tore at his heart. A half-

suppressed groan escaped him ; and Fay looked up with a start of alarm.

"Douglas—my dearest, are you ill?" she said, her weak voice full of a keen anxiety.

"No, no, foolish little woman," he said faintly. "I am a little tired—that is all."

His passion had sickened and died—for the time being ; or rather, with a strong relentless hand he had subdued himself to the hard level of everyday life again.

And Bee? Ah, Bee had had a hard time since that night in Douglas's study. Again and again Fay's white, passion-distorted face rose up before her—her frenzied accusations rang in her ears, and beat into her brain like a hammer. Would Douglas believe these cruel words?—words which held for Bee the terrible sting of truth, as far as she was concerned. Was he already pitying her, despising her, wondering over her? A woman who loved another woman's husband! His little sister Bee, whom he had thought so good and innocent. She writhed under the thought.

She used to think—as she knelt at nights trying in vain to pray—that she never *could* bear it, that any other grief would have been easier to bear than this. Even if Douglas had died—died respecting her. Poor child!—she did not remember that if we could choose our trials they would hardly be trials at all. And above all, being young, she did not know how soon we get sadly accustomed—in a sense—to most heart-pains, even those that well-nigh tear body and soul asunder. And somehow, as the days went on, she did bear it. She went about her duties as usual, her little face always sweet, if never smiling—a face that had lost all that remained of its childish look, and gained a new womanliness. But it was the womanliness that nothing but keen suffering ever brings to maturity.

One morning, quite early, before Mrs. Chandleur had come downstairs, Bee was surprised by a visit from Douglas himself. He looked so grave, so haggard that at first Bee thought Fay was seriously worse.

"What is it?" she said looking rather white. "Fay—is she worse?"

"No—she seems rather better. And, Bee—she wants very much to see you."

Her face flushed vividly. But she did not speak.

"I wanted to see you first—to tell you"—he went on hurriedly and somewhat nervously—"that—that she seems to have no recollection of her—her agitation of—of that night. She remembers dimly that something happened before she was taken ill, but she has evidently no—no other memory of it than a confused one. You will forgive her, Bee?" he added earnestly. "And put the painful memory away from you?"

"Yes"—she made answer quietly, after a brief pause. "I know—she could not mean—what she said. We will speak of it no more."

"And you will come? I will arrange for some one to be with Mrs. Chandleur. I think Fay will—will wonder if you do not come. You have always been such—friends."

"Yes," said the girl slowly. "We have always been—such friends. Yes—I will come."

So that afternoon she went; and Fay was unaffectedly glad to see her. Their old affection seemed unbroken. For as Douglas had said, Fay seemed to have forgotten the sad scene that threatened to break it. And Bee—was trying to forget.

They spent a very happy hour over the baby, who gazed at them earnestly with its great solemn eyes, like some small sphinx of old. Bee took it in her arms, and kissed it softly. Douglas's little daughter! It would have been strange if she had not loved it. It was not like him, she thought as she scanned the pinched, unbaby-like features. It reminded her of a picture she had once seen of a weirdly grave elf in some old-world legend. But its eyes were beautiful; and once, as Bee kissed it, it smiled. It was to be called Sadie, Fay said. She had always had a fancy for the name, and Douglas did not seem to care, one way or another.

Douglas took Bee home in the evening. Their drive was almost a silent one. She could not speak. He dared not. As he stood with her at her own door, he said in a low voice,

"Thank you, Bee. It was good of you to come. But—you are always good and unselfish. You always were—even as a child. Good-night, my little sister—good-night."

And with a quick clasp of the hand he left her.

His words, his tone, his look, comforted her. Perhaps—perhaps he did not know, after all. He had seemed just the same. She did not know what that seeming cost him.

(To be continued.)